



# PHOTOPLAY WRITING

By

WILLIAM LORD WRIGHT

Author of "The Motion Picture Story," "The Art of Scenario Writing," formerly Editor for the Selig Polyscope Company, Chicago; and for Pathé Exchange, Inc., New York; formerly western Representative for United Picture Theatres, Inc.; formerly Editor Serials and Western Dept. Universal Film Mfg. Co., Universal City, Calif.

*Published and Copyrighted by*

FALK PUBLISHING CO., INC.

145 West 36th Street, New York

*Used as a Supplementary Text in*

New York Institute of Photography

NEW YORK

CHICAGO

BROOKLYN

Copyright 1922  
by  
FALK PUBLISHING CO., INC.

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.

# CONTENTS

Can you Write for the Screen.....	5
What Scenario Editors Want From You.....	9
How Much Material You Need.....	18
Where to Begin Your Photoplay.....	21
Plot Construction.....	29
Aiming at a Star.....	34
How You Can Study the Screen.....	39
Your Title.....	44
What a Continuity Is.....	49
The Photoplay in Two Reels.....	60
The Five or Six Reel Feature.....	82
Writing a Serial Story.....	106
A Motion-Picture Comedy Script.....	125
An Indirect Market for Scenarios.....	145
How Censorship Affects the Writer.....	153
How to Prepare Your Manuscript.....	160
How a Story is Handled.....	165
The Language of the Screen.....	176
Titling a Separate Job.....	184
The Photoplay Market, Past, Present and Future.....	188
How and Where to Sell Your Scenario.....	197
Honesty the Governing Policy.....	204
Courses in Photoplay Writing.....	214
The Value of Organizations.....	217
A Word in Conclusion.....	223



## CAN YOU WRITE FOR THE SCREEN?

"**H**E just jotted his ideas down on the back of an envelope, that he mailed to a motion picture company, and he got a thousand dollars for the story."

"She wrote it in one evening—and they paid her fifteen hundred dollars for it and asked her to do more photoplays for them."

That's the sort of thing that we all hear about writing motion picture scenarios. We hear that just anybody, in a few moments that they have to spare, can write a scenario and get a lot of money for it—that the motion picture companies are wild for stories and can't find them fast enough.

Now this not true. There have been a very few people who could, without previous training or experience, write a story that would screen well, and that would sell. In the early days of the motion picture industry, such cases were more common than they are now, but even then they were few and far between.

But—anyone can write for the screen; that is, anyone who has a feeling for the thing that makes a screen story, for the right kind of plot—anyone who has inventive ability, and can devise new situations, and show us old ones from an angle that is new enough to interest us; anyone who can show us every-



## CAN YOU WRITE FOR THE SCREEN?

"**H**E just jotted his ideas down on the back of an envelope, that he mailed to a motion picture company, and he got a thousand dollars for the story."

"She wrote it in one evening—and they paid her fifteen hundred dollars for it and asked her to do more photoplays for them."

That's the sort of thing that we all hear about writing motion picture scenarios. We hear that just anybody, in a few moments that they have to spare, can write a scenario and get a lot of money for it—that the motion picture companies are wild for stories and can't find them fast enough.

Now this not true. There have been a very few people who could, without previous training or experience, write a story that would screen well, and that would sell. In the early days of the motion picture industry, such cases were more common than they are now, but even then they were few and far between.

But—anyone can write for the screen; that is, anyone who has a feeling for the thing that makes a screen story, for the right kind of plot—anyone who has inventive ability, and can devise new situations, and show us old ones from an angle that is new enough to interest us; anyone who can show us every-



such explanations as an inexcusable waste of his time and is therefore prejudiced against your story from the start. What he wants to know is,—Is your story dramatic? Does it hold the interest? Does the action develop naturally step by step? Is it logical? Is it appealing?

Even though the incidents included in a story did actually happen, they might not fulfill all the requirements of drama. And if your story has all these qualities the scenario editor won't care whether it ever happened in real life or not. He will be too busy writing out a check for you.

WHAT SCENARIO EDITORS WANT FROM  
YOU

**Y**OU must write your story in synopsis form.

That is, you must write your story—just what happens—and nothing more. That's all the editor wants from you. He does not want long and detailed descriptions, because he hasn't time to read them. His desk is piled so high with manuscripts that he can hardly see over it—manuscripts that his assistants have passed along to him, weeding them out of the thousands that pour into the office. You will readily see that neither they nor he can read through hundreds of pages to find out whether your story is any good or not. They want to get just the kernel of the thing, at first.

You may have heard that the story had to be submitted in continuity form—that is, scene by scene, with every bit of the action given in detail. At one time this was so, but for some years continuity has been written only by those on the inside, who were trained to write it—and the outsider can't do it. It is virtually impossible for the plot builder unacquainted with the inner rules and regulations of a motion picture studio to prepare a motion picture story in continuity. The continuity remains for the staff studio writer to prepare from the synopsis which you present.

The synopsis should be so written as to catch the eye of the scenario editor readily, for this is a great sales factor. It should be as brief as possible commensurate with the development of the plot; prepared in a workmanlike manner and, if possible, the first paragraph should be so written as to hold the attention of the editor so he will read further. In other words, the preparation of the synopsis of a motion picture story is just the old trick of writing a newspaper story all over again. If you will read the average column story in any well edited newspaper you will perceive that the first paragraph frequently contains a short and snappy resumé of the entire article, devoid of all details. It is well to write a motion picture synopsis in like manner.

This work requires thought. A well prepared synopsis is not dashed off hurriedly, but is written and then rewritten. If possible, give the editor an *idea of what it is all about in your first paragraph*, making it brief and snappy. Then, in your second paragraph, state your plot and continue right through to the finish, taking pains to avoid attempts at "fine" writing, and at all times trying to hit straight from the shoulder.

The motion picture story synopsis does not necessarily contain a mass of little details. However, if you have ideas for novel business that could be carried in the continuity it is well to embody this idea briefly in your synopsis.

The synopsis should tell the editor the plot of the story; it should tell the editor the characterization

of the people who carry out the plot; it should give him an idea of the environment or locale of the story; it should carry the big climaxes as the plot develops; and it should always carry a happy ending, if possible getting away from the usual "chaste salute."

A synopsis for a two-reel picture story can be compiled in from two to three hundred words. It is principally the idea that the editor wants for the short length production. For a feature play a synopsis can be presented in from five hundred to two thousand words, fifteen hundred words being a happy medium.

Always remember that the scenario editor is a trained man, very frequently a graduate of the newspaper school which teaches observation and the knack of knowing a good idea when encountered. So do not have any misgivings, as so many beginners do, that the editor will not understand your idea unless you go into lengthy details and write voluminously. After all, it is merely the main or striking idea, the unusual twist of the story, in which he is interested. Often the editor will buy just the main idea submitted, throwing away all else contained in the story and, with his staff, will build around this idea an entirely new continuity in detail.

So you will readily appreciate that the more clearly and the more briefly you present your idea in synopsis form, the better opportunity it will have for careful consideration.

There is presented herewith a sample synopsis as prepared for production at the studio of the Uni-

## P H O T O P L A Y   W R I T

versal Film Manufacturing Company, will give you an idea of the way in which a motion picture story synopsis should be prepared. This has been produced and is fully protected by copyright.

## "THE DREAM GIRL"

By GEORGE MORGAN

Rose Merton is returning home from an extended stay at an eastern college, planning to surprise her father. Her train is stalled. Rose wanders too far away and the train pulls out without her. Darkness overtakes her and a violent storm comes up. She takes refuge in a shack that is untenanted. Exhausted and frightened, she soon succumbs to the sleep that her tired mind and body crave.

Buck Thompson returns to the shack after a trip to a nearby hotel where he has been seeking to forget the loneliness of riding fence. Buck is a recent addition to the Merton ranch, one of the largest in the state and owned by Rose's father in conjunction with Hank Williams. Buck has been indulging in some "Angel's Dream Cider" and is feeling decidedly happy. He is bringing a jug of it home with him. He discovers Rose asleep and thinks it might be the effects of the "Angel's Dream Cider." It is such a pleasant dream that he is loath to awake, and falls asleep himself.

In the morning Rose awakens and finds Buck asleep. A mischievous idea comes to her and she straightens the bed as she has found it and steals away leaving Buck asleep in the chair. Buck awakens and to his disappointment and disgust finds



upon and captured by two of the rustler's spies. He is brought before Williams. Williams sees a way to put Buck out of the running entirely. He has Buck bound, then starts with him for the ranch house, leaving his confederates to get the Merton stock. The rustlers discover Rose and a chase starts to capture her. Rose tries a desperate plan to lead the rustlers to the outfit's camp and succeeds. The punchers chase after them while Rose rides to the ranch house to telephone the sheriff.

Williams brings Buck to Merton as a rustler, captured by him after a fight. Merton is about to telephone the sheriff when Rose arrives and claims Buck is innocent. Williams accuses her of shielding Buck because she loves him. Things look bad for Buck when the outfit arrives with captured rustlers. Williams tries to discredit Rose by accusing her of spending the night in the shack with Buck. Explanations are made that clear Rose and one of the rustlers exposes Williams as their leader.

All ends happily with Buck finding his "Dream Girl" is his real girl.

This synopsis should be accompanied by a cast of characters—a list naming each one, and telling very briefly who the person is. This should be written on a separate sheet of paper, and should be so placed that it is seen before the synopsis is read.



### CHAPTER III

#### HOW MUCH MATERIAL YOU NEED

I AM frequently asked by beginners in scenario writing, "How much material is needed for a five-reel picture—how many incidents should I have and how many characters?"

You might as well ask how many potatoes there are in a bushel. It all depends on the size of the potatoes—and of the incidents.

The amount of action, the number of scenes, must depend on your story. Perhaps it will work out in one place, at one time—that is, without any long jumps in time—and in rather simple fashion, and with just a few characters. "Broken Blossoms" is an example of a story of this type. There are but three principal characters, and few minor ones. Except for the first part of the picture, in which the Yellow Man is introduced, the story takes place in rather a short time, and is laid in just a few places.

On the other hand, such a picture as Cecil De Mille's "Fool's Paradise" uses a great number of characters and locations in the telling. Yet the first of these two is quite as dramatic as the other.

You will have to let everything be determined by the demands of your story. The location, the number and kind of people, and the things they do will all be decided by the telling of your tale. If anything

is to be added, for the sake of beauty or effect, that will be done when the story is screened.

If it seems to you that your idea is not big enough for a five-reel picture, and yet is not the kind of idea that would make a two reeler, it may be that you have not fully developed it. Study it carefully, and see whether in it something really happens—whether it is important enough, in itself, to be a screen story, or whether it is really not significant, but would work into a larger story well. Frequently we have a minor story told in a longer one; for instance, in "Hearts of the World," the love story of "The Little Disturber" was a minor one, and yet was very interesting. In "Way Down East," the story of the professor and Kate, the Squire's niece, was a minor one.

Perhaps you have too much material. In this case, it is likely that you don't know when your story begins and when it ends. Don't let it just run on and on, after the real meat of it has been used, and don't begin it in the heroine's childhood, or when the hero went to college, when the story actually becomes interesting long after that. Try beginning your story at different points, just to see what you can eliminate. Don't let it be crowded with unnecessary incidents, just because you think they are interesting.

Sometimes you can eliminate several characters by letting one of them serve two purposes. Don't use any minor characters that you don't have to. Concentrate on a few people.

## PHOTOPLAY WRITING

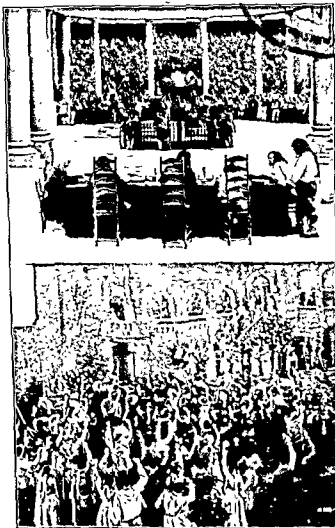
you think might make a salable story—one "just good as the ones I see on the screen." There are plenty of stories like that submitted to editors every day—and rejected by them. Your story must have a definite purpose, and it must be better than those that you see every day, to you.

Select incidents which will illustrate your theme, tell the lesson you have in mind, prove what your character would do, or develop your incident. Your story must run upward in a line of interest; it must never drop back. The climax should come at the very end, or so near it that there is no anti-climax.

There must be suspense. Don't let the audience be sure from the very beginning just how it is going to turn out. Let them wonder. In "Nineteen and Phyllis," for example, we couldn't be sure whether Charlie Ray was going to get the girl or not; we didn't know whether he'd make the money or not, or how he'd make it.

Your story must begin with action—something must happen right away. If you have to, begin with an interesting and exciting scene, and then go back afterward and explain who the people were and why they were doing what they did. But don't let your story lag when it starts, or it will stop right there, so far as ever being produced is concerned.

Don't try to write your story as soon as the theme for it or the character around which it is to be built, is suggested to you. Wait and let it develop slowly, gathering the right incidents to itself, before you



A BIG MOB SCENE WAS WELL WRITTEN AND HANDLED IN "ALL  
FOR A WOMAN," A FOREIGN PRODUCTION

(Paramount)

DON'T MODEL YOUR EFFORTS ON SUCH ELABORATE SPECTACLES  
AS "THE BRIDE'S PLAY"



"SNOW FLIND" WAS WRITTEN BY KATHERINE NEWLIN BURT, WHO EASILY HIT THE  
STRIDE OF THE SUCCESSFUL SCENARIO WRITER SOON AFTER HER  
FIRST BIG NOVEL WAS SCREENED

write it. There may be several ways of working it out, and you'll have to decide which is the best one.

Test the incidents which you decide to use, to prove whether they actually add anything to the development of the story or not. Try leaving out each one, and see what happens. If it can be left out, drop it. Your story must be action all the way through—that is, it must progress in such a way that, if people did the things on the screen which your story makes them do, the audience would understand the story and be interested in it.

Now, frequently a story which seems good will not "act"—that is, won't act on the screen, when nobody can say anything except in an occasional sub-title. Lillian Gish says that she can't tell whether a story will act or not until she has seen it run through by real people. Try this out. Two or three people can go through a whole story, working it out in terms of action, and you can tell in this way whether your story really has value or not.

If your story just goes on and on, and doesn't seem to get anywhere, the chances are that you haven't anything to say—that you have chosen the wrong incidents with which to tell it, if it is a story based on a theme, or that, if it has grown from an incident or series of incidents, the things which happen aren't of interest. Then it must be developed differently.

If you want to see for yourself how one screen story was built, read Leonard Merrick's story, "The Laurels and the Lady," and then see the motion picture called "Fool's Paradise." The two are abso-

"ON MY BLIND" WAS WRITTEN BY KATHERINE NEWLIN BLUNT, WHO EASILY HIT THE  
STAGE OF THE SUCCESSFUL SCENARIO WRITER SOON AFTER HER  
FIRST BIG NOVEL WAS SCREENED



write it. There may be several ways of working it out, and you'll have to decide which is the best one.

Test the incidents which you decide to use, to prove whether they actually add anything to the development of the story or not. Try leaving out each one, and see what happens. If it can be left out, drop it. Your story must be action all the way through—that is, it must progress in such a way that, if people did the things on the screen which your story makes them do, the audience would understand the story and be interested in it.

Now, frequently a story which seems good will not "act"—that is, won't act on the screen, when nobody can say anything except in an occasional sub-title. Lillian Gish says that she c  
will act or not until she has se  
people. Try this out. Two  
through a whole story, work  
tion, and you can tell in this  
really has value or not.

whether a story  
through by real  
people can go  
in terms of ac-  
ther your story

If your story just goes on and doesn't seem to get anywhere, the chance is that you haven't anything to say—that you have chosen the wrong incidents with which to tell it, if it is a story based on a theme, or that, if it has grown from an incident or series of incidents, the things which happen aren't of interest. Then it must be developed differently.

If you want to see for yourself how one screen story was built, read Leonard Merrick's story, "The Laurels and the Lady," and then see the motion picture called "Fool's Paradise." The two are abso-



lutely different, but the picture was suggested by the story, some of the incidents of the story were used, and others which seemed to the authors of the picture to grow out of the theme suggested to them, were used.

## CHAPTER V

### PLOT CONSTRUCTION

**W**HETHER it be a novel, a short story, or a photo play, plot is the first essential. There is no such a thing as a new plot. The best that can be done is to give the old plot some new twist or turn for novelty and freshness.

Many critics will tell you that the old "triangle," that is, the love conflict between two women and one man or one woman and two men, is hackneyed, and yet what would fiction or the screen do without the "triangle?"

Nearly every plot element can be found in the Bible. Romance, adventure, sex problems—all can be found within the covers of that Book of Books, if you but know how to look for them. Shakespeare knew this, and a number of his plots are but variations of the old, old parables and stories which the Bible presents.

If you live in a small town, why not cast your characters, your plot and your atmosphere in the environment with which you are familiar? There are just as many good stories, just as good characterizations and atmosphere to be unearthed in the village as in the city, if you have the talent to find them.

One plot or one story will often suggest another, and legitimately so. For example an Edgar Allen Poe story might have suggested to Conan Doyle the



love with the preacher's pretty daughter. He takes the text literally. Going to the clergyman he asks, "Say, Sky Pilot, do you mean that if someone hits me on one side of the face I've got to turn the other cheek to be hit also?" The preacher, sincere in his work, tells the westerner that it is so. And then the hero, who has been painted as a fighter, becomes a coward to all appearances. In a brawl he is smashed on one cheek and we see him rise and offer no resistance while his opponent smashes him on the other side of his face. Even the girl he loves, the clergyman's daughter, does not understand this attitude and believes him to be a coward. Of course, in the end the girl is in danger and our hero shouting, "cheek or no cheek, no one pulls those things here," in a rousing battle overcomes the villain and wins the girl.

So here you see how just one quotation from the Bible has been developed into a plot carrying romance, heart interest and thrills.

Frequently a plot will come to mind from some title or from a newspaper headline. It is not wise, however to become inspired by newspaper stories, as it seems to be the rule that whenever anything sensational occurs in the public prints, the scenario editor is deluged with plots similar in character and based on the same foundation.

It is also well to remember, as we stated before that the writing of "vamp" plots and sex stuff is a waste of time for, with a few minor exceptions, the motion picture manufacturer is not in the market for



of introductory matter, finally ending in a climax.<sup>61</sup> The moving-picture lovers of today demand action and yet more action. They want something to happen. This is a point of prime importance.

Don't write stories of western cowboy life. As a general thing, unless a story is very unusually meritorious, these are not desired from the outside writer. There are several well known stars who have specialized in western cowboy feature dramas, but you will notice that many of them are slowly but surely entering into other characterizations. There is an over supply of western feature pictures. The short reel western dramas are usually "built" or written by the motion-picture studio staff.

The best way to learn to write is to write.

Perry N. Vekroff, now a successful director and writer of motion-picture plays, came to the author some years ago and asked how he could succeed in writing for the screen. He was advised to enter a newspaper office and work as a reporter, even though the remuneration was practically nothing. If you will look over the lists of successful fiction writers, yes, and those who have succeeded in motion picture story writing, you will notice that nine out of ten have been newspaper men or women.

Work in a newspaper office teaches one to write under difficulties; teaches observation; to know a story when one sees a story. It is a school where terse and correct English is a requisite and is taught. It is the best shop in the world in which to learn the art of writing.

## CHAPTER VI

### AIMING AT A STAR

**F**REQUENTLY a story for the screen is suggested by a certain star's performance. Such work as Vera Gordon's in "Humoresque," or Pauline Frederick's in "Madame X," suggests stories the theme of which is mother love. More than one story with big emotional situations that fall to the lot of lonely, friendless girls, as was suggested by Lillian Gish's work in "Broken Blossoms." Norma Tallmadge, Richard Barthelmess, Priscilla Dean—every star suggests stories, suitable to that star's ability.

And many writers work with a certain star in mind, shaping their stories to one person, and submitting them to the scenario editor of that star's company when they are done.

Now, this is sometimes a good idea—that is, it's a good one if the story is accepted. And as a rule, you are more certain to land a story by writing it with a star in your mind, as it is likely to give that star the opportunities in which he or she shines. For instance, a story written for Gloria Swanson would never do for Viola Dana—nor would one written for Mabel Normand suit Pauline Frederick. So in taking careful aim and firing at a special target, you stand a good many chances of making a killing. But on the other hand, if your story is not accepted, it's lost. It's like a suit that has been made to order—

it won't fit anyone else without extensive alterations. That means that months of work on your part are lost if the star whom you had in mind when you wrote is taking a vacation, or has stories enough on hand to last for a year or two, or just doesn't care for your story.

It would seem that in a case of this kind the amateur writer is between the devil and the deep blue sea. But there's a way out.

Aim between the special star target and the one that represents just a generally good story. For instance, let us suppose that your story has a society background—that the heroine is the Gloria Swanson type, wearing beautiful gowns, doing the proper thing. You can write that story so that it would suit any of the women stars who fit such a part—Elsie Ferguson, Agnes Ayers, Norma Talmadge, or any of the others. You can afford to play up the heroine's part if you hope that Miss Ferguson or Norma Talmadge will take it, because of their ability as actresses. But if it is impossible, develop your story so that it is well balanced, and could be presented by a good all-round cast.

This gives you a broader market than if you aim at a star. It is well, of course, to study the different stars, learn what they do best, and see how situations are devised which give them a chance to see what the public likes best to see them do. Wallace Reid, Constance Talmadge, Viola Dana and Bebe Daniels are a few of the stars who have characteristics so clearly defined that they illustrate this point.



## P H O T O P L A Y   W R I T I N G

However, even though you do not aim at a star, don't just write your story "all over the lot." Your heroine will be the same general type as some star of the screen, your hero will fit into a star's mould. Know how situations are handled for stellar material, and use this knowledge in shaping your story, so that it will not be amateurish.

## CHAPTER VII HOW YOU CAN STUDY THE SCREEN

**I**F you are in earnest about wanting to be a screen writer, you will have to study the screen. Gardner Sullivan says that he might never have written motion picture stories, if his wife hadn't dragged him to the movies night after night, when he was a newspaper reporter. He didn't care a whoop about movies, but, having to sit there and look at them, he became interested. After a time he wrote a story, which was accepted by Thomas H. Ince, and the first thing he knew, he was writing for the screen—and has been doing it with more and more success ever since.

First of all, after you've seen a good picture and enjoyed the story, see it again, if you have time, and study its construction. See how the principal characters were introduced, and by what actions of theirs the story was told. Everything they do has a meaning, you know. See how the story was built up, how the interest was sustained, how the obstacles in the way of a happy ending were brought in. Write out an analysis of the story, giving just the main points of it. For instance, let's take the very light and entertaining little picture, "Don't Tell Everything," acted by Gloria Swanson, Wallace Reid and Elliott Dexter.

## PHOTOPLAY WRITING

It's a typical love story—a man, a flirt, is in love with a pretty girl. He marries her, and then has to win her over again. Her jealousy of an old flame of his, and the assistance of a man who is a mutual friend of both, help him. And from the heroine's point of view, the story is of the "how she won him" type.

Now, take those characters and that situation, and see how you'd work it out differently. Take just part of it, if you want to—the bride whose husband is flirting with somebody else, who doesn't know he's married. Or take the husband's angle—his wife doesn't understand him, and he can't make her. Write your own story, and then see how it tallies up with the one on the screen.

If you want to do this in advance, take a trade magazine which gives a review and a skeleton outline of the new pictures, and try your hand on them. See how you'd work out the story, and then go to see the picture and see how your work compares with that of the author who did the screen version. Or just take a title and see what it would suggest to you. Eric Von Stroheim's latest picture, "Foolish Wives," has an excellent title on which to work. Perhaps it would suggest a small-town story to you—a tale of neighborhood intrigue, a big drama worked out on a small scale. Perhaps it would be a tragedy, or it might be a comedy, on the other hand.

Study character development on the screen. Lillian Gish gave an interesting portrayal of a type in "Way Down East." In "Male and Female" Thomas





Meighan and Gloria Swanson showed not so much character development, perhaps, as character change. But that's what you want—the effect of circumstances on character.

Study the way in which everything is presented in terms of action—in the movements of people, not in what they say or think.

You can learn as much from bad pictures as from good ones, sometimes; their faults are likely to stand out so clearly that you can't mistake them, and it's interesting to work out a remedy. Then, too, the faults of a bad picture may show you what is wrong with one of your own stories. It may show you what in yours doesn't "go," why it doesn't get anywhere, or isn't convincing.

Find out, if you don't already know, what type of story most appeals to you, and go to see the best pictures of that type that are screened. If you can't go to see them, read about them in the trade journals. Learn how experts are doing that phase of the work which you want to do.

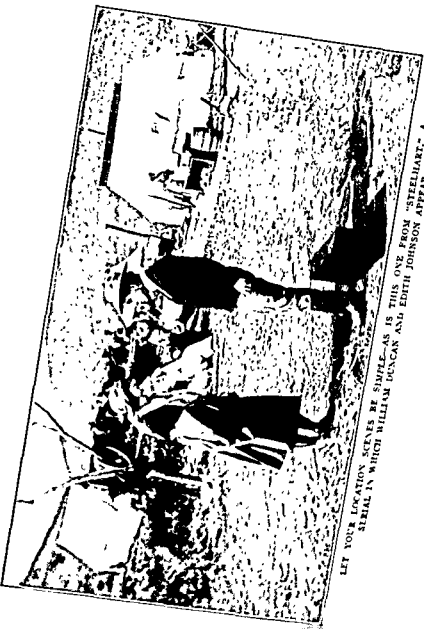




M. C. Pictures

"THE FOOLISH AGE" IN WHICH DORIS MAY AND HALLAM COOLY APPEAR, IS A  
GOOD EXAMPLE OF COMEDY DRAMA





LET YOUR LOCATION SCENES BE SIMPLE—AS IS THIS ONE FROM "STEELHEART," A SERIAL IN WHICH WILLIAM DUNCAN AND EDITH JOHNSON APPEAR

## CHAPTER IX

### WHAT A CONTINUITY IS

**A**LTHOUGH there is no chance for a free lance writer, one not a member of the motion picture studio staff, or not familiar with the rules of a studio, to write and sell motion picture continuity nine out of ten writers for the screen are ambitious to become writers of motion picture continuity. Hence a chapter having to do with the technicalities of the continuity will be of benefit to the reader.

A feature continuity may consist of two hundred and fifty scenes or it may consist of three hundred and fifty depending on the length of the scenes and the character of the story.

A two reel motion picture continuity will average approximately with closeups and flashes, one hundred and forty-five scenes. A five reel continuity will average three hundred scenes.

All the numbered scenes, however, are not scenes in the strict sense of the word. There may be a three foot flash of a forest fire, or a five foot flash of a character closeup, which carries a scene number.

Many beginners and others interested in the continuity end of the game ask primary questions such as "what is a scene" or "what is a closeup?" etc. These questions we shall endeavor to answer here.

Study the continuity which is introduced in this volume and count the scenes. A scene, in the strict

## PHOTOPLAY WRITING

sense of the word, is a particular course of action gone through on the part of the character involved. For example: a picture is opened in the interior of a country club with several of the principal characters in action. Say it is a tense scene between a man and a woman and the man's rival for the love of the woman. Perhaps a subtitle is cut into this scene carrying an accusation from one man to the woman, or vice versa. This particular scene may conclude with a struggle between the two men, with the woman a horrified spectator of the combat. Then we leave this scene for another, or, in movie parlance, we "cut to" the outside of the country club which is another scene. This second scene may depict the father of the woman or of one of the men arriving outside the building in an automobile. Father alights from the auto, climbs the steps leading to the main entrance, opens the door and goes inside. Then another scene. This just a flash perhaps, returning to the first scene and showing the two men struggling. This would be Scene No. 3 in the continuity and in the completed picture. But, perhaps, it moves so rapidly that a person unacquainted with continuity would not mentally catalogue it as a scene. From scene three we go to another scene, perhaps just a closeup of the woman, wide-eyed and with a horrified expression, watching the struggle. This would be Scene No. 4 in the continuity and in the picture, although this closeup of the woman would occupy but five feet of film. From scene four we go to a scene of father approaching the room. This might only run three or

four feet, yet it is Scene No. 50. Then we go back to the interior of the country club as in scene one, showing all the characters, with the two men still fighting. This would be Scene No. 6. Then Scene No. 7 where father bursts into the room and demands that the fighting cease.

This, in detail, is what is meant by scenes in a continuity and on the screen.

There are many and various opinions as to the proper technique in motion picture continuity. Some companies have a policy of starting to build the story rather slowly, running perhaps one-half to a whole reel of introductory matter and planting of atmosphere, characters, etc. Other producers have a theory that the story should start very fast, with a tense scene, an idea similar to the one presented in this chapter, then if there is anything to explain, to do so later and as quickly as possible.

Both forms of continuity are more or less successful, but in the opinion of the author the day is here when action, and yet more action, is desired, if the attention of the audience is to be held. This is the reason for the revival of the popularity of the two reel photoplay.

There are differences of opinion regarding the proper technique of the very beginning of the continuity, some editors contending that after the main title of the story, credit titles, etc. the action should start and if a subtitle is necessary that it should be cut into, or in other words, inserted in the first scene. Other editors see no harm in giving a subtitle be-

## PHOTOPLAY WRITING

sense of the word, is a particular course of action gone through on the part of the character involved. For example: a picture is opened in the interior of a country club with several of the principal characters in action. Say it is a tense scene between a man and a woman and the man's rival for the love of the woman. Perhaps a subtitle is cut into this scene carrying an accusation from one man to the woman, or vice versa. This particular scene may conclude with a struggle between the two men, with the woman a horrified spectator of the combat. Then we leave this scene for another, or, in movie parlance, we "cut to" the outside of the country club which is another scene. This second scene may depict the father of the woman or of one of the men arriving outside the building in an automobile. Father alights from the auto, climbs the steps leading to the main entrance, opens the door and goes inside. Then another scene. This just a flash perhaps, returning to the first scene and showing the two men struggling. This would be Scene No. 3 in the continuity and in the completed picture. But, perhaps, it moves so rapidly that a person unacquainted with continuity would not mentally catalogue it as a scene. From scene three we go to another scene, perhaps just a closeup of the woman, wide-eyed and with a horrified expression, watching the struggle. This would be Scene No. 4 in the continuity and in the picture, although this closeup of the woman would occupy but five feet of film. From scene four we go to a scene of father approaching the room. This might only run three or

four feet, yet it is Scene No. 50. Then we go back to the interior of the country club as in scene one, showing all the characters, with the two men still fighting. This would be Scene No. 6. Then Scene No. 7 where father bursts into the room and demands that the fighting cease.

This, in detail, is what is meant by scenes in a continuity and on the screen.

There are many and various opinions as to the proper technique in motion picture continuity. Some companies have a policy of starting to build the story rather slowly, running perhaps one-half to a whole reel of introductory matter and planting of atmosphere, characters, etc. Other producers have a theory that the story should start very fast, with a tense scene, an idea similar to the one presented in this chapter, then if there is anything to explain, to do so later and as quickly as possible.

Both forms of continuity are more or less successful, but in the opinion of the author the day is here when action, and yet more action, is desired, if the attention of the audience is to be held. This is the reason for the revival of the popularity of the two reel photoplay.

There are differences of opinion regarding the proper technique of the very beginning of the continuity, some editors contending that after the main title of the story, credit titles, etc. the action should start and if a subtitle is necessary that it should be cut into, or in other words, inserted in the first scene. Other editors see no harm in giving a subtitle be-

## PHOTOPLAY WRITING

sense of the word, is a particular course of action gone through on the part of the character involved. For example: a picture is opened in the interior of a country club with several of the principal characters in action. Say it is a tense scene between a man and a woman and the man's rival for the love of the woman. Perhaps a subtitle is cut into this scene carrying an accusation from one man to the woman, or vice versa. This particular scene may conclude with a struggle between the two men, with the woman a horrified spectator of the combat. Then we leave this scene for another, or, in movie parlance, we "cut to" the outside of the country club which is another scene. This second scene may depict the father of the woman or of one of the men arriving outside the building in an automobile. Father alights from the auto, climbs the steps leading to the main entrance, opens the door and goes inside. Then another scene. This just a flash perhaps, returning to the first scene and showing the two men struggling. This would be Scene No. 3 in the continuity and in the completed picture. But, perhaps, it moves so rapidly that a person unacquainted with continuity would not mentally catalogue it as a scene. From scene three we go to another scene, perhaps just a closeup of the woman, wide-eyed and with a horrified expression, watching the struggle. This would be Scene No. 4 in the continuity and in the picture, although this closeup of the woman would occupy but five feet of film. From scene four we go to a scene of father approaching the room. This might only run three or

four feet, yet it is Scene No. 50. Then we go back to the interior of the country club as in scene one, showing all the characters, with the two men still fighting. This would be Scene No. 6. Then Scene No. 7 where father bursts into the room and demands that the fighting cease.

This, in detail, is what is meant by scenes in a continuity and on the screen.

There are many and various opinions as to the proper technique in motion picture continuity. Some companies have a policy of starting to build the story rather slowly, running perhaps one-half to a whole reel of introductory matter and planting of atmosphere, characters, etc. Other producers have a theory that the story should start very fast, with a tense scene, an idea similar to the one presented in this chapter, then if there is anything to explain, to do so later and as quickly as possible.

Both forms of continuity are more or less successful, but in the opinion of the author the day is here when action, and yet more action, is desired, if the attention of the audience is to be held. This is the reason for the revival of the popularity of the two reel photoplay.

There are differences of opinion regarding the proper technique of the very beginning of the continuity, some editors contending that after the main title of the story, credit titles, etc. the action should start and if a subtitle is necessary that it should be cut into, or in other words, inserted in the first scene. Other editors see no harm in giving a subtitle be-



fore the first scene is desired. The author thinks that the introduction of a subtitle in the middle of the action of the first scene is the better method, getting away, as it does from the long footage used in the main title, director and author's credit, etc., etc.

The "fade in" of a picture means just what it says. A fade in and fade out of a scene means just what the words imply, fading from one scene to another, and as you sit in the theatre with your note book, see the picture first for entertainment and then stay for another showing and make notations as the picture is run. You will catch the business of the closeups, the fade ins and fade outs and the iris in and iris out of the story and as they appeared in the continuity from which the picture was shot.

An iris out and iris in is very frequently used to denote time lapses. Here again the continuity writer and the editor differ. Some claim that to iris out on one scene and iris in on another is self explanatory of the lapse of time. Others claim that the iris out and iris in should be interrupted by a subtitle, particularly if the time lapse is a long one. Both methods are employed.

The iris shot—the term "shot" is motion-picture vernacular for some particular detail of action—is frequently employed by the director to impress upon the audience some particular bit of emotion. For example the popular matinee heroine has resolved to go out of the life of the man she loves, and her self-sacrifice is made more impressive, at the end of a tense situation with her sweetheart, by iris-ing out

on a closeup of the heroine with the glycerine tears dropping from her lustrous eyes. This is always effective at the end of a big scene.

Ten years ago, and even more recently, the closeup in a continuity was unknown to the director. All the action was taken in long shots, that is, scenes photographed some distance away from the camera. It was Griffith, we believe, who first used the closeup. This is effective in the continuity, coming from the long shot to a closeup to impress upon the audience some particular expression, or to characterize more emphatically the principals of your drama.

Closeups vary from the very closeup to those used as a medium between the long shot and the very closeup. A very closeup shot permits only of the face of the actor being shown, or perhaps, some inanimate object which is very essential to the drama. A semi-closeup permits of more than one object or one character being shown. These shots are all used for variety or dramatic relief, for if the drama is not varied, that is, if a picture consists of five reels of action photographs in long shots it would be somewhat monotonous, and would fail to bring the audience close to the characters of the story.

A motion picture continuity consists of interior and exterior scenes, a proper continuity includes, first a synopsis, a subject we have taken up in another chapter, then the location sheet, which is drawn up for the convenience of the production department, and then the scenes, exteriors and interiors, closeups, iris shots, etc. The title includes the main title, then

the many credit titles, name of the producing company, director's and author's credit, etc.

Surprising as it may seem, a motion picture continuity or scenario, as such cannot be copyrighted in the state of California. Numerous attempts have been made to pass a copyright law in Washington to cover a motion-picture continuity, but so far these bills have never been passed upon. They have been introduced but have been laid aside for some reason or other.

A synopsis of the continuity can be copyrighted as a short story, and the completed picture is protected. The producer makes a synopsis of what is carried in his continuity and copyrights that, and this in a way protects all details of the film drama.

In writing motion-picture continuity the author must be thoroughly familiar with the strength and the weaknesses of the star for whom it is written, and the likes and dislikes of the director producing same. The customary procedure is as follows:

The staff continuity writer is given a book or an original story from which the continuity is to be written, and usually about four weeks is consumed in preparing the continuity. The feature continuity writer usually works at his home, delivering the completed script to the scenario editor at the studio. The scenario editor and the continuity man then go over the work, the editor criticizing business and making suggestions on details which do not appeal to him, these criticisms usually being based upon the policy of the producing company by whom he is employed,

and with an eye to the sales department of his company.

When the editor and the continuity man have agreed upon the continuity, the director is called into conference and proceeds to give his ideas and suggestions, and then the continuity is finally revised and is ready to be produced. In the early days of motion-picture production the director was frequently all powerful, when a continuity was considered and even after the completed script was agreed upon by all interested the director would go gayly forth and, becoming inspired, would embody a lot of original business in the story so that it appeared entirely different on the screen from the story decided upon. This policy however, proved a mistaken one and the producer discovered that often much time and money were lost in this manner.

The scenario editor is a very important functionary because he not only must be a writer with a keen sense of dramatics, but he must understand the policy of the producing company for which he works, and he should also have had experience in the sales end of the business. In fact this last is becoming a prime requisite, for it is very easy to produce a picture which may please the various boards of censors but may not appeal for export purposes and thus the company will lose money on the production. The scenario editor will keep in touch with the tastes of foreign countries, for the exporting of films made in the United States is an important and lucrative end of the film industry.

## PHOTOPLAY WRITING

The writer of motion picture serial continuity must be resourceful enough to deliver at least one two reel continuity weekly, and a working synopsis of another episode. In a rush the experienced two reel continuity writer has been known to deliver two and even three workable scripts in a week's time. This is very hard work, however, and is not customary.

The continuity writer must always have an eye to economy of production, particularly when building a five reel program picture. A certain sum is set aside to finance the production and the continuity must be so written that the allotment is not exceeded. The continuity writer must, therefore, use good common sense and not write in business calling for fleets of airplanes or battleships, etc. or other very expensive sets. He should know, too, the studio lot on which the picture is to be made, and utilize as many "stock sets" as possible. By stock sets is meant sets already built which, by a little redressing, can be made to conform to the scenes in the new story. The exterior sets must not be such as will be too expensive in point of distance from the studio. In fact, a knowledge of the geography of the country surrounding the studio is essential.

A continuity writer is paid a salary ranging from one hundred dollars per week up. Some studios employ free lance continuity writers. That is, writers who have a thorough studio education and yet prefer to work for several instead of one particular company. These men are paid one hundred dollars a week, with, perhaps, one hundred dollars bonus for



(Mack Sennett)

Phyllis Hayer and the other bathing girls saved the day for many a Sennett comedy—but don't depend on scenes showing pretty girls to save your scenario



good work. Others with greater reputations for successful continuity writing receive one hundred and fifty or two hundred dollars per reel.

As previously stated, it takes years of study and much experience in motion-picture industry to become a successful continuity writer, and unless those who read this chapter have an opportunity for employment in a studio, so they can study the methods of preparing the story, supplying sets, direction, etc., and get into the atmosphere of the studio, it is practically impossible for them to succeed along this line.





ences will countenance no other procedure. There are a number of instances where the unhappy or "logical" ending of the photoplay drama has been carried through to a finish, but in nearly every instance a new sequence has necessarily been prepared for the production and the unhappy ending eliminated. Film producers are not in business for their health and must have money to carry on production. It is believed that audiences everywhere experienced enough of gravity and sorrow during the world war, and people will not tell their friends to go to see a picture play in which the finish does not reunite the lovers in the usual happy manner. This rule applies to all motion picture productions, whether they be in six, five, two, or one reel lengths.

It is very difficult to purchase stories suitable for two reel film productions in the outside market. The free lance writer aims higher and scorns the one hundred or two hundred dollars offered for the plot to carry in two reels. He prefers to send his plots to the feature film market, hoping to be more largely remunerated. This, in our estimation, is a mistake. Many a writer can prepare a plot synopsis not exceeding five hundred words and be paid one hundred dollars for it, when the same story will not contain sufficient action and love interest to be salable for five or more reels. On the other hand, the professional writer, who knows this fact, has a similar weakness. He evolves a motion picture plot which he knows would command attention, from its novelty and action and freshness, and feels that its sale is assured

## CHAPTER X

### THE PHOTOPLAY IN TWO REELS

**I**T requires more experience, more originality, and more technique to properly prepare a two reel story, in plot and continuity, for the motion picture screen than it does for the five reel feature.

This statement may sound strange to the uninitiated, but to those of long experience in writing plots and preparing continuities for motion pictures it is not at all inconsistent and will be upheld by those who are wise in their profession. The explanation is not hard to find. The two reel motion picture, be it a drama or comedy drama, or a story of western atmosphere, carries every element contained in the five reel production; it must present these elements plausibly, smoothly and interestingly and must do it all in two reels, or approximately nineteen hundred feet of film, with subtitles. There must be the opening of the story, the building and the plot development; the big situations and the climax; comedy relief and a happy ending.

And remember this: write no story that does not end happily, or in other words, satisfactorily to the audience. There is no doubt that many fine dramas strictly true to life have become artificial and lose their convincingness to thinkers in movie audiences because of the warp and twist in the final ending to make the action end happily. Nevertheless, audi-

ences will countenance no other procedure. There are a number of instances where the unhappy or "logical" ending of the photoplay drama has been carried through to a finish, but in nearly every instance a new sequence has necessarily been prepared for the production and the unhappy ending eliminated. Film producers are not in business for their health and must have money to carry on production. It is believed that audiences everywhere experienced enough of gravity and sorrow during the world war, and people will not tell their friends to go to see a picture play in which the finish does not reunite the lovers in the usual happy manner. This rule applies to all motion picture productions, whether they be in six, five, two, or one reel lengths.

It is very difficult to purchase stories suitable for two reel film productions in the outside market. The free lance writer aims higher and scorns the one hundred or two hundred dollars offered for the plot to carry in two reels. He prefers to send his plots to the feature film market, hoping to be more largely remunerated. This, in our estimation, is a mistake. Many a writer can prepare a plot synopsis not exceeding five hundred words and be paid one hundred dollars for it, when the same story will not contain sufficient action and love interest to be salable for five or more reels. On the other hand, the professional writer, who knows this fact, has a similar weakness. He evolves a motion picture plot which he knows would command attention, from its novelty and action and freshness, and feels that its sale is assured

to the editor of the short reel department. Yet this writer, although there is not material enough in his story to carry it further, will not let it go for that price, and holds it believing that later he will be able to amplify the plot and be paid five hundred dollars or more for it instead of one hundred dollars. Nine out of ten of the professional screen writers are doing this very thing.

Another fact is, that many would-be writers aiming to succeed in the photoplay market, are better adapted to write successfully for two reel dramas than for the more pretentious stories. This is, seemingly, a characteristic of the writer. His temperament, his ability to build situations, his experience and his observations of life all, undoubtedly, have an important bearing on the matter. The rule is the same as the rule which holds that some men and women are better adapted to writing comedy plots than dramatic productions, or vice versa. No one can explain it, it is simply an inherent talent of the writer.

Of the two reel productions in vogue, both in the United States, Canada, and for foreign export, the two reel western story seems destined to go on forever. Ever since the old days, when the "movie" industry was in its infancy, the "bold, bad man" of the west, quick at the trigger and a master horseman, has disported in movie land. It is true that the demand for western features of five or more reels has declined from time to time, but, with slight market variations, the two reel western drama has gone on, and today is

even more numerous and popular than ever before. One reason for this is the cheapness of production. A western street set and the open country; the star, the heroine, the old ranch house and a half dozen cowboys being about all the essentials for a two reel western production. And, too, the short western drama lends itself to unlimited action, the fighting, the horsemanship, the cattle rustling, and various other stunts performed all being calculated to add variety and interest to the picture.

Herewith is a sample continuity of a two reel story. This was produced, exactly as written, by the Universal Film Manufacturing Company at Universal City, and is protected by them by copyright. Contrary to the continuity taken from the Pocock novel in the following chapter, this continuity was written from an original story intended for a two reeler. This will give the reader another angle as to the preparation of a continuity. Note the number of scenes, the method of building up the story; how the subtitles are worded; and other technical items having to do with this continuity, and see how in a more restricted space, the same effects are gained as in the longer manuscript. You will find that it carries the six reel story boiled down, containing atmosphere, climax, and in general versatility being as interesting, perhaps, as the feature continuity. In other words, the two reel drama is a tabloid drama, a feature film concentrated, and we repeat that in many of its details is the more difficult to prepare, so that the story will continue smoothly to its appointed end.



## THE PHOTOPLAY IN TWO REELS

---

picture producer cannot go to China to put on a two reel story, nor a five reel feature. Give the producer something that can be produced largely at the motion picture studio, and in the surrounding territory.

Here is the two reel continuity.

### "THE CALL OF THE BLOOD"

#### LOCATIONS

Below are the numbers of the scenes which are to be enacted in this setting:

##### *Interiors*

- |                       |  |
|-----------------------|--|
| 1—Int. Gambling House | 14, 15, 23, 24, 94, 95, 96,<br>97, 98, 99, 100, 101, 102<br>and 103. |
| 2—Int. Living Room    | 28, 30, 32, 34, 35, 36, 37,<br>38 and 39.                            |
| 3—Int. Bunkhouse      | 40, 41, 45, 46, 48 and 49.   |
| 4—Int. Ruth's Bedroom | 64 and 66.   |

##### *Exteriors*

- |                              |  |
|------------------------------|--|
| 5—Ext. Ranch Country         | 1.   |
| 6—Ext. Corral                | 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 9 and 11.  |
| 7—Ext. Near Corral           | 7.   |
| 8—Ext. Ranch House           | 10, 12, 13, 15, 17, 18, 19,<br>20, 21, 22, 27, 29, 31, 33,<br>53, 54, 55, 56, 58, 60, 61,<br>70, 72, 76 and 125. |
| 9—Ext. Gambling House        | 25, 50 and 93.   |
| 10—Ext. Real Estate Office   | 26, 47, 51 and 52.   |
| 11—Ext. Bunkhouse            | 43.  |
| 12—Ext. Near Bunkhouse       | 42 and 44.   |
| 13—Ext. Near Ranch and House | 57, 59, 67, 69, 71, 74, 78,<br>80, 104, 126, 127, 128<br>and 129.  |



# PHOTOPLAY WRITING

14—Ext. Brush Near Roadside	62, 63 and 68.
15—Ext. Barn	65, 110, 112, 114, 115 and 117.
16—Ext. Near Barn	113.
17—Ext. Road Near Ranch House	73, 75, 77, 79, 81, 82, 83, 84, 85, 86, 87, 88, 89, 90, 91 and 92.
18—Ext. Open Country Road	105, 106, 107, 109, 111, 118 and 120.
19—Ext. Brush	108 and 116.
20—Ext. Another Road	119.
21—Ext. Cliff	121.
22—Ext. Bottom of Cliff	122, 123 and 124.

Story by GEORGE MORGAN

Scenario by GEORGE MORGAN

MAIN TITLE: "THE CALL OF THE BLOOD."

SUBTITLE: THE MELTON RANCH—THE LARGEST IN THE GREAT STATE OF TEXAS AND THE BOAST OF SECO COUNTY.

SCENE 1—EXT. RANCH COUNTRY. IRIS IN. LONG SHOT Of ranch country showing ranch house, etc. IRIS OUT.

SUBTITLE: BOB MATTHEWS, FOREMAN OF THE MELTON RANCH AND THE BEST RIDER AND BRONCHO BUSTER IN THE SOUTHWEST.

SCENE 2—EXT. CORRAL. OPEN IRIS ON CLOSEUP BOB His arms resting on a rail of the corral watching something out of scene—

SCENE 3—EXT. CORRAL

Two punchers holding a "bronc"—a third is tightening the cinch—he then mounts quickly and the other two let go and duck—the bronco starts to pitch and buck in an effort to throw the rider—the puncher hangs on for a while and is thrown—





## THE PHOTOPLAY IN TWO REELS

---

### SCENE 4—EXT. CORRAL

Bob shakes his head and smiles as he sees the rider thrown—one of the two punchers comes to him—says:

SUBTITLE: "TAIN'T NO USE FER US TO TRY ANY MORE, BOB . . . THAT CAYUSE IS A BAD ACTOR—RECKON YOU'LL HAVE TO TAKE HIM YOURSELF."

Bob looks toward the corral thoughtfully—then nods—exits with puncher—

### SCENE 5—EXT. CORRAL

Puncher who was thrown and the other one finally succeed in catching the bronco and hold him as Bob and puncher come on—Bob goes to horse's head—talks to him to quiet him as he strokes him gently—then works his way to saddle—makes a quick jump and lands in the saddle—punchers let go—bronco starts to cut up—cut in closeups according to action—of Bob on bronc and of punchers watching—Bob subdues the bronc and turns him over to the other punchers to look after—punchers lead bronc off—Bob looks after them—

### SCENE 6—EXT. SAME LOCATION. CLOSEUP

Of Bob looking after the punchers taking the horse away—turns and looks toward where the horse is (out of picture)—an affectionate smile comes to his lips—he whistles—

SUBTITLE: HIS ONE AND ONLY "PAL."

### SCENE 7—EXT. NEAR CORRAL. CLOSE SHOT

Of "Pal"—Bob's horse—looks up and toward Bob at the whistle—goes out of scene toward Bob—

### SCENE 8—EXT. CORRAL

"Pal" comes on to Bob—rubs his nose against Bob's arm to attract his attention—Bob pretends that he doesn't see him—then he turns to the horse and laughs as he pets him affectionately.

### SCENE 9—EXT. SAME LOCATION. CLOSE SHOT OF THE TWO.

Bob showing his great affection for the horse—the horse rub-



## THE PHOTOPLAY IN TWO REELS

---

### SCENE 4—EXT. CORRAL

Bob shakes his head and smiles as he sees the rider thrown—one of the two punchers comes to him—says:

SUBTITLE: " 'TAIN'T NO USE FER US TO TRY ANY MORE,  
BOB . . . THAT CAYUSE IS A BAD ACTOR—RECKON YOU'LL  
HAVE TO TAKE HIM YOURSELF."

Bob looks toward the corral thoughtfully—then nods—exits with puncher—

### SCENE 5—EXT. CORRAL

Puncher who was thrown and the other one finally succeed in catching the bronco and hold him as Bob and puncher come on—Bob goes to horse's head—talks to him to quiet him as he strokes him gently—then works his way to saddle—makes a quick jump and lands in the saddle—punchers let go—bronco starts to cut up—cut in closeups according to action—of Bob on bronc and of punchers watching—Bob subdues the bronc and turns him over to the other punchers to look after—punchers lead bronc off—Bob looks after them—

### SCENE 6—EXT. SAME LOCATION. CLOSEUP

Of Bob looking after the punchers taking the horse away—turns and looks toward where the horse is (out of picture)—an affectionate smile comes to his lips—he whistles—

SUBTITLE: HIS ONE AND ONLY "PAL."

### SCENE 7—EXT. NEAR CORRAL. CLOSE SHOT

Of "Pal"—Bob's horse—looks up and toward Bob at the whistle—goes out of scene toward Bob—

### SCENE 8—EXT. CORRAL

"Pal" comes on to Bob—rubs his nose against Bob's arm to attract his attention—Bob pretends that he doesn't see him—then he turns to the horse and laughs as he pets him affectionately.

### SCENE 9—EXT. SAME LOCATION. CLOSE SHOT OF THE TWO.

Bob showing his great affection for the horse—the horse rub-

# PHOTOPLAY WRITING

bing his nozzle against Bob—Bob looks off—his expression changes as he sees—

SUBTITLE: RUTH MELTON, THE DAUGHTER OF "OLD MAN" MELTON, OWNER OF THE MELTON RANGE, IS "PAL'S" ONLY RIVAL IN BOB'S AFFECTIONS.

SCENE 10—EXT. RANCH HOUSE

Ruth comes from the house—stands leaning against post on porch—

## OMITTING SCENES 10 to 70

SCENE 70—EXT. RANCH HOUSE

Ruth comes from house timidly—is carrying grip—looks about uncertainly—

SCENE 71—EXT. NEAR RANCH HOUSE BRUSH. CLOSEUP OF DICK

Sees Ruth—whistles—

SCENE 72—EXT. RANCH HOUSE

Ruth hears whistle—looks off—

SCENE 73—EXT. ROAD NEAR RANCH HOUSE

Bob riding along—head bent—hears whistle—looks up around—sees—

SCENE 74—EXT. NEAR RANCH HOUSE BRUSH. CLOSE SHOT OF Dick beckoning to Ruth—

SCENE 75—EXT. ROAD NEAR RANCH HOUSE

Bob has pulled up—looks from Dick to direction of ranch house—sees—

SCENE 76—EXT. RANCH HOUSE

Ruth sees Dick—waves back to him—hurries in his direction—

SCENE 77—EXT. ROAD NEAR RANCH HOUSE

Bob looks from Ruth's direction to Dick—is puzzled by what

## THE PHOTOPLAY IN TWO REELS

---

he has seen—suddenly realizes its import—his mouth tightens in a grim line as he heads his horse toward Dick—

### SCENE 78—EXT. NEAR RANCH HOUSE

Ruth runs to Dick—both are anxious in their manner—he puts her grip in the buckboard and helps her in—looks about quickly and starts as he sees—

### SCENE 79—EXT. ROAD

Flash of Bob heading toward Dick—

### SCENE 80—EXT. NEAR RANCH HOUSE

Dick tells Ruth—Ruth looks off in alarm—Dick jumps into buckboard—lashes the horse—drives off—both look back anxiously—

### SCENE 81—EXT. ROAD

Bob urging his horse on—shouts to the others—

### SCENE 82—EXT. ROAD

Buckboard on from behind camera—Dick lashing the horse—Ruth looks back with frightened eyes—Bob dashes by in pursuit—draws up to the buckboard—

### SCENE 83—EXT. ROAD FROM DIFFERENT ANGLE

Buckboard approaching camera—Bob alongside—throws himself from his own horse to the one in the buckboard—brings it to a halt—slips off the horse's back and holding the bridle turns and faces the others—Ruth looking at him with frightened eyes—Dick defiantly—

### SCENE 84—EXT. SAME LOCATION

Close shot of Dick and Ruth—Dick steals a glance at Ruth—she looks at him helplessly—Dick turns toward Bob with an air of bravado—orders him to let go of the horse—raises the whip threateningly—

### SCENE 85—EXT. SAME LOCATION

Closeup of Bob—looks at Dick with quiet determination—slowly shakes his head—



PHOTOPLAY WRITING

SCENE 86—EXT. SAME LOCATION

Full shot broadside—Bob shaking his head—Dick angrily jumps from buckboard—goes to Bob threateningly with whip—Bob does not flinch—

SCENE 87—EXT. SAME LOCATION

Closeup of Dick and Bob—Dick, blustering, orders Bob to let go of the horse or he'll make him—raises the whip as though to strike him—Bob makes no move to defend himself—just looks at Dick sadly—holds the situation of the two looking at each other—one sorrowfully the other threatening, defiant—Dick breaks it slowly lowering the whip—loses his defiance—tells Bob he has no right to interfere—Bob tells him—

SUBTITLE: "IF I DIDN'T INTERFERE I WOULDN'T BE ABLE TO FACE MR. MELTON, KNOWING THAT MY BROTHER HAD WRONGED HIM."

Dick turns on Bob with a sneer—says:

SUBTITLE: "MAYBE YOU WANT HER FOR YOURSELF!"  
The shot hits home—Bob's jaws set like a vise—he says sharply—

SUBTITLE: "IF I DID, I'D GO TO HER FATHER LIKE A MAN AND ASK FOR HER."

Dick's lips curl in contempt—

SCENE 88—EXT. SAME LOCATION

Closeup of Ruth—has been watching the scene between the two brothers—at Bob's words her head drops in shame—realizing he is right—

SCENE 89—EXT. SAME LOCATION

Bob and Dick—Bob recovers himself—forces a smile a bit ashamed at the temper he has shown—puts his hand on Dick's shoulder—affectionately—starts to plead with him—Dick chafes under Bob's words finally throws the hand off his shoulder and exclaims passionately—

## THE PHOTOPLAY IN TWO REELS

---

SUBTITLE: "I'M SICK OF YOUR PREACHING—I'M GOING TO DO AS I PLEASE."

Dick turns angrily and exits—Bob looks after him sadly—

SCENE 90—EXT. SAME LOCATION

C. U. of Ruth—looking after Dick—the glamour of the romantic elopement has worn off—there is an expression of doubt in her eyes as she looks after him—

SCENE 91—EXT. SAME LOCATION

Full shot—Bob turns and looks at Ruth—sees she is looking after Dick—picks up the whip that Dick had thrown down and hands it to her—she takes it without a word and picking up the reins starts to turn the buckboard without vouchsafing Bob a look—Bob walks towards his horse that is grazing nearby—

SCENE 92—EXT. SAME LOCATION BY HORSE

Bob comes on to horse slowly—mounts—looks off after Dick—shakes his head sadly—then heads for the ranch—*Fade Out*—

SUBTITLE: THINKING THAT RUTH IS PINING FOR DICK, BOB GOES IN SEARCH OF HIM.

SCENE 93—EXT. GOLDEN CHANCE GAMBLING HALL

Bob rides in—dismounts and enters—

SCENE 94—INT. GAMBLING HALL

Full shot showing men at tables, etc., gambling—and dancing going on—Bob enters—stands in doorway—

SCENE 95—INT. SAME LOCATION

C. U. of Bob in doorway—looking around—sees—

SCENE 96—INT. SAME LOCATION

Flash of men playing cards at table—Dick among them—

SCENE 97—INT. SAME LOCATION

Full shot—Bob leaves door—goes to table where Dick is playing—

SCENE 98—INT. SAME LOCATION

Med. shot at table—Bob on to Dick—Dick scowls when he sees Bob—Bob starts talking to him—

## P H O T O P L A Y   W R I T I N G

SUBTITLE: BULL JACKSON, PROPRIETOR OF THE GOLDEN CHANCE AND ALL AROUND "BAD MAN."

SCENE 99—INT. SAME LOCATION

C. U. of Jackson looking around—his eyes narrow as he sees—

SCENE 100—INT. SAME LOCATION

C. U. of Bob and Dick—Bob trying to persuade Dick to leave with him—Dick refuses defiantly—Bob good naturedly puts his hand on Dick's arm—trys to pull him away—Dick throws his hand off—

SCENE 101—INT. SAME LOCATION

C. U. of Jackson—watching scene—an ugly expression comes into his face—as he sees Bob interfering with one of his customers—he exits toward them—

SCENE 102—INT. SAME LOCATION

Med. shot at table—Bob is trying to force Dick from table—Jackson on grab Bob—pulls him away—looks at him threateningly—as he warns Bob to leave Dick alone—Bob comes back at him—Jackson loses his temper, makes a pass at Bob—Bob dodges the blow and lands one on Jackson—fight starts—

SCENE 103—INT. SAME LOCATION

Full shot—of fight—some of Jackson's henchmen come to his aid—Bob fights the whole bunch—Bob has the gang licked—he looks around—no one wants more—he goes to Dick—grabs him by the arm and asks—

SUBTITLE: "ARE YOU GOING WITH ME PEACEABLY OR MUST I TAKE YOU"?

Dick starts to protest—Bob without a word drags him from the saloon—*Fade Out*—

SUBTITLE: JACKSON'S SCHEME FOR REVENGE—AND PROFIT.

## THE PHOTOPLAY IN TWO REELS.

SCENE 104—EXT. NEAR RANCH. FADE IN

Dick, Jackson disc. Dick talking—all furtive in their manner—  
—Dick says

SUBTITLE: "EVERYTHING'S FIXED—THE OUTFIT'S AWAY  
SO WE CAN——"

Jackson grins in satisfaction—slaps Dick on the back—they  
slip away together—

SCENE 105—EXT. OPEN COUNTRY

Bob rides in—pulls up—looks off searchingly—

SCENE 106—EXT. OPEN COUNTRY ROAD

Flash of sheriff and a few men—

SCENE 107—EXT. OPEN COUNTRY

Bob rides out to meet the sheriff—

SCENE 108—EXT. ROAD

Rustlers waiting—Dick and Jackson on to them—Jackson  
gives them hurried instruction—all sneak off—

SCENE 109—EXT. ROAD

Sheriff and others—Bob in to them—sheriff questions Bob—  
Bob shakes his head—sheriff tells him—

SUBTITLE: "JACKSON AND HIS GANG HEADED OUT THIS  
WAY—I THINK THEY'RE UP TO MISCHIEF."

Bob questions the sheriff—then rides with them toward  
ranch—

SCENE 110—EXT. BARN

Dick, Jackson and rustlers on and into barn—

SCENE 111—EXT. ROAD

Flash of Bob and sheriff's posse riding towards ranch—

SCENE 112—EXT. BARN

Rustlers leading horses from barn—

SCENE 113—EXT. NEAR BARN

Posse rides in—dismount—exit toward barn—Bob leading—

for the motion picture screen. The reason for this is that in a majority of the "six best sellers" only a few of the principal characters, the bare outline of the plot and the atmosphere of the locale of the story can be utilized. It, therefore, depends upon the film continuity writer, with or without the aid of his scenario editor, to introduce the necessary action.

It must also be remembered that the greater number of the popular novels depend a great deal upon descriptive matter, and probably we are safe in saying that they are in the proportion of one-third action and the other two-thirds characterizations and word paintings. "Word paintings" cannot be used on the animated screen—action is all that is required.

The additional value of the popular novel for film purposes is very often the poster value of the title of the book and the name of the author, and because of this, popular novels have commanded large sums in the photoplay market, five thousand dollars being a minimum price for the film rights of a widely read book, while seven thousand five hundred and ten thousand dollars are not extraordinary sums to be paid by any means. Just the same, the book does not make as good a film as does the original motion picture story.

The continuity which is presented in this chapter was written by Mr. Fred Myton and is copyrighted by the United Picture Theatres, Inc.

A motion-picture continuity taken from a book is technically the same as one taken from an original story or from a plot written expressly for the screen.

CLARA KIMBALL YOUNG DOES PICTURES OF A DISTINCT TYPE





As stated heretofore, it is only for the reason that this continuity was produced almost exactly as written and will appeal not only to those interested in feature film continuity but also to those who have known and loved this novel, that it is presented. Please note the location sheets, exteriors and interiors. You will observe that the exterior locations greatly exceed in number the interior locations. This is because from a standpoint of expense an exterior location is more desirable than an interior. Interior locations in motion-picture plays frequently mean that special sets must be built, while exterior shots are not so costly. These location sheets go to the production manager and to the "location man," so called, who prepare therefrom the special sets and the exterior locations desired.

Here are parts of the continuity:

### "A MAN IN 'THE OPEN"

By ROGER POCKOCK

Screen Version by Fred Myton

#### SCENE 1—EFFECT OF STORM AND ROUGH WATER

*Dissolve to.*

#### SCENE 2—EXTERIOR STERN OF SCHOONER

Studio set against black backing. Wheel foreground and the curved stern rail in back. Source of illumination is the binnacle light with the intermittent flashes of lightning. Rain and wind effect.

Typical Down East schooner captain at wheel, wearing Sou'wester and oil-skins. Straining every muscle as he struggles with the wheel, an air of tense nervous excitement. Jesse Smith



# SCENARIO WRITING

enters and Captain orders him to take the wheel as he, the Captain is not strong enough to handle it. Jesse takes the wheel and Captain staggers out.

SCENE 3—EXTERIOR SIDE OF DECK HOUSE  
Just a plain board wall. A box about four or five feet long two feet high and two feet wide built on the deck beside the deckhouse. A lantern swinging on the wall from a bracket. Same storm effect.

Captain staggers in and with an air of much excitement and hurriedly gets some signal rockets from the locker. Gets ready to fire them.

SCENE 4—EXTERIOR STERN  
Jesse struggling with the wheel and trying to see through the darkness ahead of the ship.

SCENE 5—EXTERIOR HILLSIDE  
A small shelter built with a tarpaulin fastened between a couple of trees. Tarpaulin does not cover entire screen, the black background can be seen on either side of it. Source of illumination is a small camp fire built in the lee of the tarp. Some rain and storm effect.

A cowboy wearing a slicker and typical large hat seated by fire, holding his horse by the bridle reins. The horse standing just at the edge of the shelter. Another cowboy rides up at other side of shelter. Dismounts and squats down by the fire. Throws the water from his hat and wipes his face with bandana handkerchief.

SCENE 6—SEMI CLOSEUP OF THE TWO COWBOYS  
The second one dries his hands by wiping them on his shirt, and as he fishes out his cigarette material he remarks. *Insert Title:*

"The old Gulf is sure roarin'  
an' buckin' tonight."

*Back:* He continues with his cigarette, the other nods and looks off supposedly in the direction of the gulf. Sees something that interests him and calls the others' attention to it.

## THE FIVE OR SIX REEL FEATURE

---

### SCENE 7—SHOT OVER THE WATER AT NIGHT

Signal rocket seen in the distance.

### SCENE 8—SEMI CLOSEUP OF TWO COWBOYS. SAME AS SCENE 6

Both are looking out in the direction of the gulf. Turn to each other and make some remark about the ship that is sending up the rockets. Indicate that it is in no way possible for them to help the ship that is in distress. Turn back and continue looking in the direction of the gulf.

### SCENE 9—EXTERIOR STERN OF SCHOONER. SAME AS SCENE 2

Jesse still struggling with the wheel. Captain sends up a rocket shortly after the opening. Is getting another ready to send up, then a stream of water from the fire hose is turned directly on the box containing the binnacle light, knocking it out of the picture.

### SCENE 10—EXTERIOR LOW, FLAT BEACH. DAY SEQUENCE

*Iris on Title:* Sunrise on the wind-swept shore of Southern Texas.

*Dissolve Title to*

Water line quite a little back from foreground. Jesse wearing his life preserver, is back in the water about waist deep, wading slowly and wearily front. He comes well up on the land and turns to look back at the scene.

### SCENE 11—SEMI CLOSEUP OF JESSE. SHOOTING INLAND

*Title:* Jesse Smith—a product of the Northern woods, as natural and unworldly-wise as the beasts that roamed his native forest.

He is looking out over the ocean reflectively as if wondering how he ever made it to shore. His attention is called to the life-preserver that he is wearing and seeing no further need of it, he takes it off and drops it down on the sand. Tries weakly to exit and sinks to the sand in exhaustion.

### SCENE 12—EXTERIOR LOW, ROLLING COUNTRY SUPPOSEDLY SOUTHERN TEXAS

Brookes enters near foreground horseback, driving four or

# PHOTOPLAY WRITING

five very good looking horses before him and leading another that is saddled and bridled. They are not ordinary range animals but look to be blooded stock. He has rifle in gun-boot under left leg, saddle bags are stuffed full and a blanket roll is tied back of his cante. He drives off a small hill in background when he pulls up his horse.

SCENE 13—SEMI CLOSEUP OF BROOKES

*Title:* Jim Brookes—an adventurer with a careless, free and easy outlook on life—and the property rights of other people. Has turned in his saddle so that he is looking back in the direction from which he had entered, has a tense, earnest expression on his face as if it were a matter of some importance. He is a man about twenty-five rather good looking in a dissipated way and dressed in a very dandified cowboy style. He smiles, satisfied with the outlook in back and starts to turn away.

SCENE 14—EXTERIOR SEA SHORE. SAME AS SCENE 11  
Jesse rises to his feet and wearily exits inland.

SCENE 15—SAME AS 13. LONGER SHOT  
Brookes now changes horses, mounting the one that he has been leading, and continues on back driving the horses before him.

SCENE 16—EXTERIOR NEAR SEA SHORE  
Jesse enters and sits down in the shade of a bush or rock. Sits thinking a moment, gazing reflectively off into space and then starts to go through his pockets.

SCENE 17—SEMI CLOSEUP OF JESSE  
Takes pipe from his pocket and also a leather tobacco pouch.

Pours some of the tobacco, which is just a sodden pulp, into his hand. Looks at it sadly a moment, then spreads the tobacco from the pouch out on top of a flat rock so that it can dry. Then takes the remainder of his worldly possessions from his pocket consisting of a few coins and some odds and ends. Holds them in his hand and sits looking at them reflectively. Looks up as if he heard a noise.



(United Press)

ECCENTRIC CHARACTERS SOMETIMES DO MUCH FOR A STORY, AS IN 'THE VENGEANCE TRAIL'—BUT HANDY THEM SOMETIMES, OR THEY WILL BE ABANDONED



## THE FIVE OR SIX REEL FEATURE

---

SCENE 18—SAME AS 16. LONGER SHOT. SHOOTING INLAND

Jesse in foreground looking back. Brookes drives his horses in from around clump of brush in back, and he himself follows shortly afterwards. Jesse getting to his feet right at the opening. Brookes pulls up his horse, very much startled and surprised and half reaches for his gun.

SCENE 19—CLOSEUP OF BROOKES

Looking at Jesse searchingly. Is relieved at Jesse's appearance and the tensy of his attitude somewhat relaxes. He speaks  
*Insert Title:*

"Howdy stranger—what you doin'  
in this country?"

*Back:* Waits for an answer.

SCENE 20—CLOSEUP OF JESSE

He smiles slightly in a whimsical manner and replies. *Insert Title:*

"This country just happened to  
be here when I swum up."

*Back:* Indicates the ocean with a wave of his hand and tells about being ship wrecked.

### OMITTING SCENES 21 to 223

SCENE 224—SEMI CLOSEUP OF JESSE AND KATE

Both are watching Trevor with horrified expression on their faces. Kate covers her face with her hands.

SCENE 225—FLASH OF TREVOR STRUGGLING IN THE WATER

SCENE 226—EXTERIOR RIVER BANK

Shot to include the three. Jesse impulsively starts to Trevor's rescue. Brown stops him and says "Not a chance." Points off.

SCENE 227—FLASH OF RAPIDS

SCENE 228—TREVOR STRUGGLING IN THE WATER

SCENE 229—RIVER BANK. SEMI CLOSEUP OF THE GROUP

Showing by their expression that Trevor is drowned. Kate

# PHOTOPLAY WRITING

still with her hands over her face. Jesse puts his hand gently her arm and tells her that her husband is dead. *Iris Out.*

SCENE 230—EXTERIOR JESSE'S CABIN. DAY SEQUENCE  
*Iris in on Title:* In the days that followed—Life stole in as gently as the fragrant South wind.  
Cabin built in picturesque, rugged location.

Kate is sitting near the door in a home-made invalid chair. Billy is standing near her looking off with an air of discontent. Turns to Kate and says disgustedly *Insert Title:*  
"What kind of a life is this—for a man with red blood in his veins?"

*Back:* Continues talking for a moment in the same manner. Kate smiling as if humoring him and at the same time enjoying it all. Jesse enters from cabin and stands for a moment watching Billy with a whimsical smile.

SCENE 231—CLOSEUP OF JESSE  
Listens a moment and then asks *Insert Title:*  
"Say youngster—Where's the castor out of that table leg you sawed off for your mother?"

SCENE 232—EXTERIOR CABIN. SAME AS SCENE 230  
Billy looks up, disgusted at such a prosaic interruption. Remarks shortly that he threw it away and then stalks out of scene. Jesse comes up to Kate and they both look after Billy and smile. Jesse then asks about her ankle and bends over it.

SCENE 233—INTERIOR JESSE'S CABIN  
Mrs. O'Flynn in scene going about the house-work. She now has a table leg in place of the other broken wooden leg.

SCENE 234—EXTERIOR CABIN. SEMI CLOSEUP OF JESSE AND KATE  
He looks up from fixing her ankle and tells her jokingly

## THE FIVE OR SIX REEL FEATURE

---

### *Insert Title:*

"You're a heap better patient than Jones—  
She most generally kicks me out of the  
stable when I touch her sore leg."

*Back:* Kate laughs delightedly at his way of looking at things and Jesse smiles in sympathy with her laughter. He straightens up on the bench, where he is sitting near her. And, resting his hand on his knee, gazes off into the distance. Kate follows the direction of his gaze and both fall into a rather musing, pensive silence.

### SCENE 235—DISTANT SHOT, SHOOTING DOWN ON THE TOPS OF PINE TREES.

Are some interesting bit of wild animal life—anything to be in keeping with the atmosphere of the scene and locale.

### SCENE 236—SEMI CLOSEUP OF KATE AND JESSE

Both looking off with the same pensive expression. Kate smiles a little and unconsciously puts her hand over on the top of his hand that is resting on his knee. He looks down at the hand smilingly and then becomes aware of this and looks down at the hands. Slowly lifts her eyes to his and they smile understandingly. *Iris Out.*

### SCENE 237—EXTERIOR RUGGED WILDERNESS. DAY SEQUENCE

*Iris in on Title:* In the spring following their marriage, Brookes appeared from out of the past like a bird of ill omen.

Brookes, Whiskers and Billy in the lead riding front. The stolen stock in back of them and the other two outlaws bringing up the rear. Billy is all swelled up with pride and talking with an important air. He pulls up in F. G. and indicates the surrounding country with a wave of his arm as if telling them that this is the place for them to stop. Whiskers and Brookes stop and look around with an air of satisfaction. They talk together for a moment, then Brookes receives some directions from Billy and rides out. Whiskers calls back to the other two outlaws.



# PHOTOPLAY WRITING

still with her hands over her face. Jesse puts his hand gently her arm and tells her that her husband is dead. *Iris Out.*

SCENE 230—EXTERIOR JESSE'S CABIN. DAY SEQUENCE  
*Iris in on Title:* In the days that followed—Life stole in as gently as the fragrant South wind.

Cabin built in picturesque, rugged location.  
Kate is sitting near the door in a home-made invalid chair. Billy is standing near her looking off with an air of discontent. Turns to Kate and says disgustedly *Insert Title:*

"What kind of a life is this—for a man with red blood in his veins?"  
*Back:* Continues talking for a moment in the same manner. Kate smiling as if humoring him and at the same time enjoying it all. Jesse enters from cabin and stands for a moment watching Billy with a whimsical smile.

SCENE 231—CLOSEUP OF JESSE  
Listens a moment and then asks *Insert Title:*

"Say youngster—Where's the castor out of that table leg you sawed off for your mother?"

SCENE 232—EXTERIOR CABIN. SAME AS SCENE 230  
Billy looks up, disgusted at such a prosaic interruption. Remarks shortly that he threw it away and then stalks out of scene. Jesse comes up to Kate and they both look after Billy and smile. Jesse then asks about her ankle and bends over it.

SCENE 233—INTERIOR JESSE'S CABIN  
Mrs. O'Flynn in scene going about the house-work. She now has a table leg in place of the other broken wooden leg.

SCENE 234—EXTERIOR CABIN. SEMI CLOSEUP OF JESSE AND KATE  
He looks up from fixing her ankle and tells her jokingly

## THE FIVE OR SIX REEL FEATURE

---

### *Insert Title:*

"You're a heap better patient than Jones—  
She most generally kicks me out of the  
stable when I touch her sore leg."

*Back:* Kate laughs delightedly at his way of looking at things and Jesse smiles in sympathy with her laughter. He straightens up on the bench, where he is sitting near her. And, resting his hand on his knee, gazes off into the distance. Kate follows the direction of his gaze and both fall into a rather musing, pensive silence.

### SCENE 235—DISTANT SHOT, SHOOTING DOWN ON THE TOPS OF PINE TREES.

Are some interesting bit of wild animal life—anything to be in keeping with the atmosphere of the scene and locale.

### SCENE 236—SEMI CLOSEUP OF KATE AND JESSE

Both looking off with the same pensive expression. Kate smiles a little and unconsciously puts her hand over on the top of his hand that is resting on his knee. He looks down at the hand smilingly and then becomes aware of this and looks down at the hands. Slowly lifts her eyes to his and they smile understandingly. *Iris Out.*

### SCENE 237—EXTERIOR RUGGED WILDERNESS. DAY SEQUENCE

*Iris in on Title:* In the spring following their marriage, Brookes appeared from out of the past like a bird of ill omen.

Brookes, Whiskers and Billy in the lead riding front. The stolen stock in back of them and the other two outlaws bringing up the rear. Billy is all swelled up with pride and talking with an important air. He pulls up in F. G. and indicates the surrounding country with a wave of his arm as if telling them that this is the place for them to stop. Whiskers and Brookes stop and look around with an air of satisfaction. They talk together for a moment, then Brookes receives some directions from Billy and rides out. Whiskers calls back to the other two outlaws.

## SCENE 238—EXTERIOR DOORWAY OF JESSE'S CABIN

SEMI CLOSEUP OF KATE standing in doorway gazing off into the distance with a pensive, happy smile.

## SCENE 239—EXTERIOR RUGGED COUNTRY

Jesse riding front. Suddenly pulls up in F. G. with an air of surprise and looks off.

## SCENE 240—EXTERIOR. SAME AS SCENE 237. A DISTANT SHOT, SHOOTING DOWN ON THE OUTLAW CAMP.

General air of activity with them making camp.

## SCENE 241—EXTERIOR SAME AS SCENE 259

SEMI CLOSEUP OF JESSE looking down on the outlaw camp with a very thoughtful air.

## SCENE 242—EXTERIOR JESSE'S CABIN. SHOOTING ALONG FRONT OF CABIN

Kate still standing in F. G. Brookes rides in back. Dismounts and comes up to her. Removes his hat with quite a flourish and bows. *Insert Title:*

"I called to see Mr. Smith on a matter of business."

*Back:* Twirls the end of his mustache and looks at her with his best "Lady killing" manner. Shows that he is very much taken by her appearance and looks at her appreciatingly. Kate, on the other hand, is far from impressed by him and shows an instinctive dislike for him but the laws of hospitality must be observed. She informs him that Jesse is not at home just now, and indicating the open door asks if he will come in and wait. Brookes thanks her very profusely, very much exaggerated in all his airs of put-on politeness. He indicates that she precede him and they both exit into cabin.

## SCENE 243—INTERIOR JESSE'S CABIN

Brookes and Kate entering. He looks around with an air of interested superiority, "What a charmingly picturesque place." All his mannerisms showing that he is trying to make a "mash."

## THE FIVE OR SIX REEL FEATURE

---

Taking her for an unsophisticated backwoods girl he thinks to impress her with his air of worldiness. Door opens in back of them. Mrs. O'Flynn sticks her head in and looks at them curiously a moment, then withdraws her head and closes the door. Brookes drapes himself gracefully by the fireplace, talking to her and twirling his mustache.

### SCENE 244—EXTERIOR JESSE'S CABIN

Jesse rides in. Looks in surprise at Brookes' horse. Dismounts and exits into cabin.

### SCENE 245—INTERIOR JESSE'S CABIN. SEMI CLOSEUP INSIDE DOOR

Jesse enters and pauses in surprise upon seeing Brookes, and is not at all agreeably surprised. After the first flash of expression that betrays his true state of mind, he composes his expression so as not to show his dislike of Brookes and exits F. G.

### SCENE 246—INTERIOR CABIN. FULL VIEW

Jesse coming from door, both turned in his direction. Jesse comes up looking at Brookes inquiringly as if wondering what he wants. Brookes is very cordial. *Insert Title:*

"Quite like old times to see you again—Sailor Jesse."

*Back:* Holds out his hand. Jesse dodges shaking hands with him by waving his right hand at a chair and asking him to sit down. Brookes holds up his hand in refusal, saying that he cannot stop but a minute. Apparently did not notice Jesse's refusal to shake hands.

### SCENE 247—CLOSEUP OF BROOKES

Explaining the nature of his visit. *Insert Title:*

"We thought this place abandoned and intended to rest up our stock a couple of months."

Hark: *Just now a figure with an air like mine to make her last appearance.*

SCENE 226—*ENTER WOMAN*

Hark of Mrs. O'Toole looking through the door

SCENE 227—*ENTER WOMAN'S LATER*

Just still trying to make her leave and she still looking.  
He gives up and looks at her finally as he says, "Just then."

"I can't help it, Harry—let me just  
you ride the cow-boy home."

Hark: He gives her some final advice as he returns to with  
he is gone. Kisses her goodbye, means and then. Last words  
watching her, waves after him. She then grows more quiet  
and a bright smile comes to her face. Smiles with F. G.

SCENE 228—*ENTER OTTAWA CAMP LATER*

Bill, Whiskers and other two natives stand around the  
camp. Bricks enter and starts telling them about the work of  
his mission.

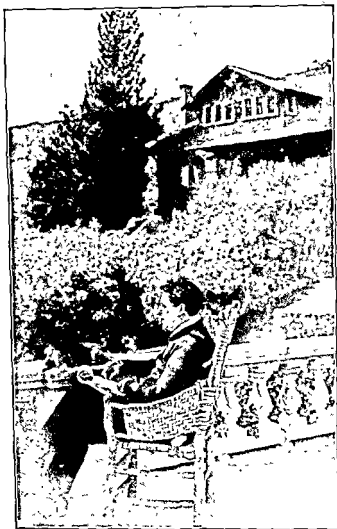
SCENE 229—*ENTER AMONG FIRST TRAIL*

Large pine where you can get the camera-like effect if  
possible.

Kate enters F. G. and walks slowly back. She poses in  
medium background and holds up her arms in a gesture of sup-  
plication. She then sinks to her knees in an attitude of prayer,  
in a state of anguish that makes its way through the work. A  
double exposed Angelic figure fades in, holding in his arms an  
infant which he holds out towards her. The double exposed figure  
is made with a shorter background than Kate so that it will be of  
larger than human proportions. The figure fades out. Kate re-  
turns to her knees. Job Cut.

SCENE 230—*ENTER OTTAWA CAMP*

Mrs. O'Toole's Trunk. Outside of camp as before.  
Mrs. O'Toole enters and tells them about what she heard through  
the big hole. They are very much excited about the news and



It's quite likely that the star who makes your story will take a hand in writing the continuity—William Farnum is one of those who has much to do with his pictures all the way through



CONSTANCE TAYMAIGE MAKES SOME OF THE BEST OF THE LIGHTER PICTURES--AND  
WHEN JOHN EMERSON AND ANITA LOOS DO THE SUBTILES, YOU  
CAN LEARN MUCH FROM THEM

## THE FIVE OR SIX REEL FEATURE

---

argue back and forth as to what is the best thing to do. Brookes finally says: *Insert Title:*

"There's only one way that I know of  
to be sure that he keeps his mouth shut."

*Back:* He looks from one to the other significantly. They nod, "Guess that's the thing to do." All get ready to ride out.

### SCENE 261—EXTERIOR FERRY BROWN'S SIDE

Brown on the ferry mending one of the ropes that is somewhat frayed. The boat is out a little ways from the shore. Jesse and five or six ranchers ride in and come to the edge of water and hail Brown.

### SCENE 262—CLOSEUP OF BROWN

He looks up. Then spits into the water reflectively before he answers. Then says: *Insert Title:*

"Just hold your hosses—I ain't gonna  
take no chance of loosen my ferry boat."

*Back:* Turns back calmly to his work.

### SCENE 263—EXTERIOR WOODS

Flash of Brookes and outlaws, also Billy, riding.

### OMITTING SCENES 264 to 314

### SCENE 315—SEMI CLOSEUP OF POLLY AND BILLY

Billy is talking to her and just as Jesse enters, Billy says: *Insert Title:*

"Brookes has thrown you down—He's up  
at Mrs. Trevor's house now."

*Back:* He starts to go into detail about what he saw. Jesse grabs him by the shoulder and questions him fiercely. "Is Brookes at her house?" Billy nods. Jesse drops him and exits hurriedly. Polly looks after Jesse with an expression of wild alarm. Then starts looking in back of bar for gun.

### SCENE 316—INTERIOR BAR ROOM—LONG SHOT

Polly hunting frantically for revolver. Billy watching her



# PHOTOPLAY WRITING

disappointedly, things had not worked out at all as he expected. Polly finds gun and runs around bar. Billy gets in the road and tries to stop her. "Listen Polly—That Brookes is no good." She throws him aside frantically. "You damn fool—get out of my way. She runs out. Billy stands looking after her helplessly for a moment and then follows.

## SCENE 317—INTERIOR TREVOR'S CABIN

SEMI CLOSEUP OF Brookes and Kate. Brookes is still talking and Kate is beginning to grow slightly impatient. Brookes reaches the point of making his proposition. *Insert Title:*

"Polly hasn't any class—Now, with you as a partner, I . . ."

*Back:* Kate jumps up, insulted. Angrily orders him from the house. Brookes tries to argue with her. "Don't fly off the handle like that." He takes hold of her arms, trying to make her listen to him. She tries to fight herself free, Brookes lustful.

## SCENE 318—EXTERIOR TREVOR CABIN

Jesse running up to cabin.

## SCENE 319—INTERIOR TREVOR CABIN. FULL VIEW

Kate trying to wrench herself free from him. Jesse throws the door open and it looks to him as if Brookes was laying violent hands upon Kate. Both turn at Jesse's entrance and Brookes reaches for his gun, but Jesse has him by the throat before he can get it.

## SCENE 320—SEMI CLOSEUP OF JESSE AND BROOKES

Brookes fighting to free himself—Jesse grimly intent upon killing him.

## SCENE 321—SEMI CLOSEUP OF DOOR

Polly runs in from out of the darkness and pauses in doorway. Raises her revolver, Billy runs in and catches her just as

## THE FIVE OR SIX REEL FEATURE

---

### SCENE 322—INTERIOR CABIN. LONG SHOT

Brookes is hit. Jesse frees him and looks toward the door and Brookes sinks to the floor.

### SCENE 323—SEMI CLOSEUP OF POLLY AND BILLY

She is passive in his grasp.

### SCENE 324—SEMI CLOSEUP OF BROOKES ON FLOOR

Leaning on his elbow and looking at Polly with an expression of hatred. Jesse kneels beside him to see how badly he is hurt. Brookes gasps. *Insert Title:*

"She got me—But I'll spoil her game—"

*Back:* Pauses a moment gasping, then continues. *Insert Title:*

"She never was your wife, Smith—

Ran away from her husband with me."

*Back:* Continues talking weakly.

### SCENE 325—INTERIOR ROOM. FULL VIEW

Brookes sinks back on floor unconscious. Polly breaks away from Billy and throws herself down on Brookes, crying hysterically. Jesse rises slowly and turns to Kate, who is standing protectingly in front of the child.

### SCENE 326—SEMI CLOSEUP OF KATE AND JESSE

An expression of almost unbelievable happiness growing on their faces. He whispers to her "You heard?" She nods and they both look down at the child that is playing with the bear and horse.

*Iris Out.*

## CHAPTER XII WRITING A SERIAL STORY

**I**N 1921 there came a radical change in the form of the motion-picture serial story, because of the requirements of censorship. Before that time the movie serial story was considered the "penny dreadful" of the animated screen. This class of story appeals particularly to juveniles, and the censors took the stand that with the violence so prevalent after the close of the world war, the sensationalism always rampant in the movie serial did more harm than good to the mind of Young America.

The motion-picture serial consists of fifteen episodes in two parts, or eighteen episodes in two parts, depending upon what production company makes the picture. The Pathé Company has always been favorably inclined toward the fifteen-episode serial, with sometimes the first episode in three parts and the rest in two, while the Universal Film Mfg. Company and several other companies prefer the eighteen two-part episode serial.

When motion pictures became universally popular the dime novel of the good old days fell into oblivion. In fact, the movie serial took the place of the nickel and dime novel which presented "Diamond Dick," "Nick Carter," "Old Sleuth," etc., to the youngsters. Censors object to the serial picture on the ground that, while right is always finally triumphant, it takes

from fifteen to eighteen episodes to prove that fact, and the hero or heroine is always in imminent danger from the machinations of the criminal master minds or the band of conspirators at the end of each episode, until the wind-up of the serial story.

In many states in 1921, censors ruled against the motion-picture serial in its form at that time, prohibiting the holdups, the liberal use of firearms, torturing of the hero or heroine, and particularly against the method of handling the women characters of the story. Some censorship boards refused to permit even the laying of a hand upon a woman character.

As the serial story has been a great source of revenue to the motion-picture producing companies, in fact, being depended upon to pay the overhead of some concerns, those companies were naturally loath to stop the production of the serial, and the serial, consequently, underwent a radical transformation.

An attempt has been made to base the serial story on some historical groundwork, the Universal Film Mfg. Company being the pioneer in this effort. There came forth in 1921 several serials of the new type, notably one based on the adventures of Henry M. Stanley in Africa in his search for Doctor Livingstone; and another based on the gold strike in California in 1848, when Captain John C. Fremont was blazing a wagon trail to the shores of the Pacific Ocean. Instead of the tortures, holdups, criminal conspiracies, etc., natural thrills and hazards such as really occurred during the historical periods mentioned proved to be a happy idea, and it was discov-

Prices for serial stories vary from five hundred to ten thousand dollars for an idea. The higher prices were formerly paid for the use of some popular novel carrying action and thrills and other serial interest. Among the novels which have been utilized for serials are "The Diamond Queen" by Frutelle; "The Gold Worshippers", "The Double Cross" by Gilson Willets; "What Happened to Mary", which first appeared as a continued story in a weekly publication etc. The free lance writer who can supply ideas for serial wanted today and tomorrow, is assured good prices and quick action.

A serial must necessarily be directed to the merits of some particular star. For example, a story intended for Ruth Roland would not do for William Duncan; neither would a serial plot written around the capabilities of Eddie Polo suit Eileen Sedgwick. The serial star and his capabilities must be studied and the idea written to conform therewith. The most difficult star, of course, to fit a story to in the serial game is the female heroine, and the irony of it is that the feminine star is always the most popular.

From a sales standpoint it should always be remembered that John C. Fremont, Henry M. Stanley, and like historical characters are good in the United States and Canada, perhaps, but do not mean so much for export purposes. South America, Cuba, France and Spain in particular, like mystery elements, thrills and a venture, and are perfectly willing to forget the educational end of the story. This must be taken



(Reel 1)

SUCH PICTURES AS "ROOM AND BOARD" MADE BY CONSTANCE  
BINNEY, ARE GOOD EXAMPLES FOR THE AMATEUR WRITER



(Continued)

CHARACTER PICTURES ARE LIKELY TO BE HARD TO SPILL, AND  
ALL STARS ARE AS WILLING AS ALL E BRAY IS TO  
WORK BEAUTY FOR THE SAKE OF ART

into consideration when writing your ideas for a serial story.

There are many, many events in American history that contain good serial material. There are many events in world history that would prove interesting serial stories. But as in the feature story, the idea must be written up with an eye to economy. Costume stuff is particularly expensive requiring special sets, etc., and ideas concerning the French Court of Louis XVI, Washington crossing the Delaware, and similar stories may require a large ensemble of people and other expenses which would be prohibitive for serial purposes.

The best way to ascertain the trend of events in the serial world is to follow the serial pictures in the theatres. Watch carefully, noting how the climax is built up and how the big situations are worked up with the producers' eye to censorship requirements. This is the only way in which the would-be writer of serial plots can keep pace with the development and changes in this particular field of the motion picture industry. In our opinion the writer who carefully studies the changes in the production of movie serials and tries to conform with the ideas of the censors, has an opportunity for developing a remunerative field of his own.

We submit the first and second episodes of a story of the new type of serial, which contains the elements upon which the serial plot must be founded in future if movie serial stories are to continue. This continuity, "Winners of the West" deals with the gold





(Reel 1)

CHARACTER PICTURES ARE LIKELY TO BE HARD TO SELL. NOT  
ALL STARS ARE AS WILLING AS ALICE BRADY IS TO  
SACRIFICE BEAUTY FOR THE SAKE OF ART

into consideration when writing your ideas for a serial story.

There are many, many events in American history that contain good serial material. There are many events in world history that would prove interesting serial stories. But as in the feature story, the idea must be written up with an eye to economy. Costume stuff is particularly expensive requiring special sets, etc., and ideas concerning the French Court of Louis XVI, Washington crossing the Delaware, and similar stories may require a large ensemble of people and other expenses which would be prohibitive for serial purposes.

The best way to ascertain the trend of events in the serial world is to follow the serial pictures in the theatres. Watch carefully, noting how the climax is built up and how the big situations are worked up with the producers' eye to censorship requirements. This is the only way in which the would-be writer of serial plots can keep pace with the development and changes in this particular field of the motion picture industry. In our opinion the writer who carefully studies the changes in the production of movie serials and tries to conform with the ideas of the censors, has an opportunity for developing a remunerative field of his own.

We submit the first and second episodes of a story of the new type of serial, which contains the elements upon which the serial plot must be founded in future if movie serial stories are to continue. This continuity, "Winners of the West" deals with the gold



(Reclart)

CHARACTER PICTURES ARE LIKELY TO BE HARD TO SELL; NOT ALL STARS ARE AS WILLING AS ALICE BRADY IS TO SCORN BEAUTY FOR THE SAKE OF ART

into consideration when writing your ideas for a serial story.

There are many, many events in American history that contain good serial material. There are many events in world history that would prove interesting serial stories. But as in the feature story, the idea must be written up with an eye to economy. Costume stuff is particularly expensive requiring special sets, etc., and ideas concerning the French Court of Louis XVI, Washington crossing the Delaware, and similar stories may require a large ensemble of people and other expenses which would be prohibitive for serial purposes.

The best way to ascertain the trend of events in the serial world is to follow the serial pictures in the theatres. Watch carefully, noting how the climax is built up and how the big situations are worked up with the producers' eye to censorship requirements. This is the only way in which the would-be writer of serial plots can keep pace with the development and changes in this particular field of the motion picture industry. In our opinion the writer who carefully studies the changes in the production of movie serials and tries to conform with the ideas of the censors, has an opportunity for developing a remunerative field of his own.

We submit the first and second episodes of a story of the new type of serial, which contains the elements upon which the serial plot must be founded in future if movie serial stories are to continue. This continuity, "Winners of the West" deals with the gold

# PHOTOPLAY WRITING

"In 1848, however, occurred an event which brought to new land adventurers by the thousands. This event was the discovery of gold on Sutter's Creek!"

## SCENE 3—INSERT AS AT END OF FIRST INSERT

The hands turn over page and disclose a full-page illustration of gold-washers along Sutter's Creek. The picture is taken shooting up stream and shows a dozen or more men in the costume of the time, standing at the water's edge working their placer claims with pick and shovel, gold-pan and cradle. A few are seen making rude shelters in the brush near the stream, while one of them is waving at a man who is coming down a gentle slope to the stream leading a pack mule with an outfit.

After the illustration has been registered, bring it closer until the margin of the page is lost and only the picture remains. Then the figures come to life, all carrying on the work they were seen doing in the still picture—the scene runs long enough to get the idea of the atmosphere and environment across—then a slow fade out.

## TITLE: A FALL MORNING IN 1848 FINDS THE VILLAGE OF BOONEVILLE, MISS., IN A FEVER OF EXCITEMENT

## SCENE 4—EXT. SHOOTING FULL LENGTH OF STREET IN BOONEVILLE. FACING THE CAMERA AT THE EXTREME END OF THE STREET IS THE VILLAGE TAVERN, IN FRONT OF WHICH RUNS A CROSS STREET.

(Note: The western street now standing can be made to serve for this by removing the sidewalks, putting in a few picket fences and dressing it up with some trees.)

### FADE IN.

A couple of horses are tied to a rail in front of the tavern—a wagon or two drawn up on either side of the street—several people are discovered standing in front of the tavern all watching down the side street out of picture, pointing and talking excitedly among themselves about what they see—others enter the scene from the tavern and side street and from houses along the main street—they join the original group and share their excitement—

## WRITING A SERIAL STORY

---

Well down-stage is the cottage of Dr. Edwards—in the front yard Elizabeth Edwards (lead) is discovered at work on some rose bushes beside the picket fence—evidently she is too much engrossed in her work to have noticed the commotion—

### SCENE 5—EXT. STREET IN FRONT OF TAVERN. FULL SCENE

The crowd stand as in previous scene looking down the cross street and talking about something well out of picture—

### SCENE 6—EXT. SIDE STREET FROM THE CROWD'S ANGLE. LONG SHOT

Down-stage a house or two on each side of the street suggests the edge of town—beyond the houses the street becomes a narrow dirt road which leads up over a gentle rise in the distance—

Discovered on the road is a caravan of wagons and horsemen with a few men walking beside it moving slowly towards the camera—

• • • • •

### SCENE 147—EXT. AS IN 145

Indian pointing out route train will take—suggests they go to pass and cut them off—agreed—they wheel their horses and ride out of scene taking course parallel to that of wagon train in bottom of valley—

### SCENE 148—EXT. VALLEY. FULL SCENE OF WAGON TRAIN

The wagons and riders are moving past camera—a man on horseback rides slowly past camera half-asleep—on the seat of a wagon passing the camera the driver is discovered curled up asleep, the reins tied to a bow of the wagon covering—Edwards wagon brings up the rear—Louis riding beside it without a rifle—Edwards sits hunched forward paying no attention to anything—Louis and Betty chatting pleasantly—the idea is to give the impression of absolute unpreparedness for the Indian attack that is coming—

### SCENE 149—EXT. HILLS

Band of Indians ride in at a run—through scene and out past camera.

# PHOTOPLAY WRITING

other's face for evidence to prove his suspicions—he lets the book fall to the table without looking at it—without taking his eyes from the squire's face he indicates the letter in his hand and asks:

TITLE: "DO YOU KNOW WHAT IS IN THIS LETTER?"

Back to Scene: Squire licks his lips nervously—shakes his head—replies with an effort at nonchalance:

TITLE: "WHY, NO, I—HOW COULD I KNOW? IT WAS SEALED!"

Back to Scene: Art's expression does not change—it is clear he is not convinced—for a moment he stares at squire—then he starts looking for the map in the book—the squire's face changes expression as he watches Art—the look of half fear changes to one of scheming as he watches—if Art gets nasty, the squire will meet him half-way—Art continues turning the pages searching for the map—

TITLE: MILES TO THE WEST—THE GOLD-SEEKERS

SCENE 5—EXT. SHOOTING ACROSS BROAD VALLEY. LONG SHOT  
In distance wagon train disc. moving toward camera—

SCENE 6—EXT. SAME. CLOSER SHOT

Wagon train moving through scene past camera—a rider sits his horse almost asleep—on the seat of wagon passing camera the driver is curled up asleep—Edwards' wagon coming behind it (the last of the train)—Betty and father disc. on seat—Betty talking to Louis who rides beside it with no gun—

TITLE: LOUIS BLAIR, WHOSE SCHEMING KEPT STANDISH OUT OF THE EXPEDITION

SCENE 6—EXT. SAME LOCATION. C U OF LOUIS FROM BACK OF CAMERA CAR

He rides slowly after car smiling and talking with Betty (out of picture).

TITLE: BETTY EDWARDS, THE UNCONSCIOUS CAUSE OF LOUIS BLAIR'S HATRED FOR STANDISH . . .



"WE MUST HAVE ACTION" IS THE CRY OF THE SCENARIO EDITOR--HE WILL BE SATISFIED IF YOUR STORY HOLDS SUCH SCENES AS THIS ONE FROM "STEELHEART"





CHILDREN'S PICTURES ARE AN ART ALL BY THEMSELVES, BUT MORE THAN ONE  
AMATEUR HAS BROKEN INTO SCENARIO WRITING BY BEGINNING ON THEM

## WRITING A SERIAL STORY

---

SCENE 7—EXT. SAME. FROM BACK OF CAMERA CAR. C U OF BETTY

She sits on driver's seat of wagon talking to Louis (out of picture)—she is pleasant but shows no great regard for him—

TITLE: DOCTOR EDWARDS, HER FATHER . . .

SCENE 8—EXT. SAME. FULLER SCENE TO INCLUDE THE DOCTOR

He sits hunched forward on seat driving—he holds reins loosely and appears about half asleep—

TITLE: ON THE HILLS ABOVE THEM—

SCENE 9—EXT. BROW OF HILL SUPPOSEDLY OVERLOOKING VALLEY BELOW. FULL SCENE

A lone Indian rides into scene and pulls up at edge of hill—sits his horse looking down at wagon train in valley—he watches a second—then pointing down into valley with one hand he turns and beckons with the other to the rest of the party (out of scene)—they ride into scene at his signal and gathers around him looking down into valley where he points—they see—

SCENE 10—EXT. VALLEY.. SHOOTING DOWN FROM A HEIGHT. IRIS LONG SHOT

Wagon train disc. in valley moving slowly on its way—

SCENE 11—EXT. BROW OF HILL AS IN 9. CLOSER SHOT

Indians disc. as before—looking down into valley and watching wagon train—the one who first appeared points down into valley and with his arm indicates the route the train will take—signifying they will travel along the valley and head through the pass at the lower end—the others follow the course he points out and end by looking off toward the pass at the farther end of valley (out of picture)

SCENE 12—EXT. SHOOTING TOWARD PASS THROUGH HILLS. IRIS LONG SHOT

Register pass through which wagon train is to pass—



CHILDREN'S PICTURES ARE AN ART ALL BY THEMSELVES, BUT MORE THAN ONE  
ARTIST HAS PROVEN HIS SCENARIO WRITING BY BEGINNING ON THEM

## CHAPTER XIII

### A MOTION-PICTURE COMEDY SCRIPT

THE familiar quotation "Laugh and the world laughs with you; weep and you weep alone" is a particularly trite one in the motion picture comedy. But, just the same, to make an audience laugh through the medium of the motion picture screen is one of the greatest arts—an art much more difficult of accomplishment than to make audiences weep.

In years of experience in the motion picture profession the writer has found that it is almost an impossibility for the free lance writer to present acceptable farce comedy of the Charlie Chaplin type for moving picture purposes, for this reason:

Motion picture farce comedy, particularly of the custard-pie variety is not written, but rewritten. A majority of the comedies of the slapstick variety are built around some very slight idea, and more frequently built by the members of the comedy staff. Much of the business of the comedy "gags" are thought of by the star, the director or the camera man, or some member of the company, as the work of making the comedy progresses. Very often you will see the heads of a motion picture farce comedy company in earnest confab, working along similar lines to the skull practice of the baseball or football squad. They are talking over an idea, volunteering, weighing and dissecting incidental business calcu-

lated to enrich that idea and create the much desired laugh.

Charlie Chaplin who is, perhaps, considered the greatest artist in the motion picture world today, buys little or nothing from outside sources. He builds. The development of his ideas and also of the incidental business, grows as he goes along in his production. He works slowly and produces an immense quantity of film, which is cut down and edited to commercial length pictures. He reserves the best "shots" and the best business in this boiled down version.

While there are many motion picture staff writers specializing in comedy, who have a peculiar talent along farce comedy lines, the fact remains that in the end their principal occupation is to put the ideas of the director, the star and the writer into motion picture continuity. They seldom or never furnish a complete script individually, or without the aid of other members of the company.

It is true that on occasions farce comedy ideas and stories are purchased from outside sources, but this is the exception rather than the rule. You will find that when such stories are purchased, they are rarely of the slapstick or throwing-of-the-pie variety but are more of the comedy drama type, carrying more pretentious plot and depending less on the knock-down-and-drag-out details so customary to the farce comedy production.

It is becoming more and more difficult to present acceptable farce comedy ideas for the screen. Every-

thing has been done, and although the pie in the farce gag continues to bob up serenely in two out of three slapstick comedies, you will notice that the leaders, such as Chaplin, are leavening their slapstick comedy with touches of pathos, Chaplin's "The Kid" being a comedy along this particular line. It is really not a comedy, but a drama of human life, lightened with comedy.

For the outside writer to succeed at all in his endeavor to market slapstick comedy, he must study and know the characteristics of the various stars in Movieland. Charlie Chaplin, Al St. John, Larry Seaman, Lee Moran, Harold Lloyd and Ben Turpin, and others, all have their own methods and their own characteristics, and these must be very carefully studied, and the story must move around the star for whom it is to be made available.

However, in the opinion of the author, it is a waste of time for the writer to attempt to cater to the farce comedy market. Those experienced in the making of movie comedies can think of the trick bakery, the pie throwing, the park bench hits just as readily, or more readily than the writer outside the studio. So the question naturally arises, why should the comedy producer pay out good money to some writer who, nine times out of ten can only suggest business that has been done before. It is much better for the ambitious writer to study movie comedy drama and melodrama than to look for ways and means to sell farce comedy ideas.

Motion picture comedy is a strange thing, indeed.

Surprises await the producer as well as the audience when the completed production is shown. What the star, the director and the producer fondly hoped would create riotous mirth on the part of the audience, frequently falls flat. And on the other hand, some little gag or piece of business considered of minor importance in the making of the picture may prove a merry-making hit.

In the building of a motion picture farce comedy a great deal also depends upon the lines or subtitles. The writing of the subtitles is an art in itself, which we propose to treat upon in a succeeding chapter.

In making farce comedy pictures, the producer works upon one theory, namely, that the audience likes to see the misfortunes of the other fellow. If the refined gentleman in evening dress and high hat can stumble and fall into a puddle of water; or dear old father can receive a moist chocolate cake in the middle of his classic countenance; or if the comedy tramp can pick up the cookstove, fire and all, and dash madly down the street, the smoke pouring from the chimney, and the two reeler end with the over popular "chase," including a comedy automobile hazard, plunging over the cliff, narrow escapes from the ever present passenger train, etc., these items are all included in sure fire motion picture farce comedy.

There was a time when the comedy policeman poured into the patrol wagon and gave chase at the end of nine out of ten comedy farces, but this became so stereotyped that the comedy producer was obliged to give up the good old standby.

Mixed with the above gags is a modicum of threadbare plot, any old plot sufficient to carry along the business of the ordinary slapstick comedy.

It is true that a number of the farce comedy stars, including Chaplin and others, have endeavored to get away from the old ingredients and to put originality and new thought into the making of these productions and have succeeded. But the fact remains that a great deal of the routine movie comedy has shown little change in the last four or five years. In 1920 and 1921 some of the farce comedy producers turned to the plain burlesque, that is, a burlesque of the grand old plays, including among them "Uncle Tom's Cabin," "East Lynne," etc. These were gratefully received by the long suffering movie fans. The idea of casting the comedy into other than present day environment—depending upon radically different atmosphere to carry the old gags, was also tried out. This furnished additional comedy relief. These included the comedy star who disported himself as a centurion in the days of ancient Rome, the Robinson Crusoe, Jr. ideas, etc.

The usual length of a motion picture farce comedy is one to two reels, and there must be no let up for a moment in the action. There have been notable exceptions, of course, to the two reel farce comedies, particularly the five reel Mack Sennet farce comedies; the "Tilly's Nightmare" productions with Marie Dressler and Chaplin; and the "Connecticut Yankee" satire of Mark Twain's. Without exception these have been big money makers. That they



have not been more numerous is due to the fact that they are expensive to produce and require time in the making, because a comedy idea to run five reels is a rare thing. They are also experiments in one sense of the word, for not even the producer knows whether the audience is going to laugh or cry when his comedy is presented.

If, however, you are firmly determined to write farce comedy, and nearly everyone of the big movie producers are making one and two reel comedies, try to cast your idea in some novel environment, avoiding carefully these ideas:

The rural comedy with the yokel and the country girl, wearing the sunbonnet, and the burlesque comedy man from the city as the heavy.

Chases, whether by automobile, motorcycle, patrol wagon or other description.

Any burlesque version of the old plays or classics. These are thought of by the studio staff.

Stories having to do with burlesque football, baseball or other sports.

Trick bakeries, exchange of pies, etc.

Write your ideas very briefly, for it is the plot and atmosphere only that the farce comedy director wants and not incidental gags which you will find almost impossible to present from the viewpoint of novelty and freshness. They have all been done that can be done.

And remember that the remuneration for ideas for farce comedy is not at all commensurate with the worth of such ideas. Despite the fact that novel farce

## A MOTION-PICTURE COMEDY SCRIPT

comedies are scarce, the money you will receive for your ideas will not be great in amount. One reason for this, unless you should be so fortunate as to suggest an idea for a five reeler, is that the producer of one and two reel pictures depends more on quantity production than on the separate picture. A one or two reel farce comedy released weekly or semi-monthly means only a small profit per picture, hence the price for the idea must be kept commensurate with the character of the production. This applies to the program farce comedy picture and not to the Mack Sennet or Chaplin comedy features.

Here is part of a continuity of a farce comedy produced by Universal Film Mfg. Company, written by W. Scott Darling, a very successful and well known staff comedy writer. It will give you a very good idea of how a comedy is built into continuity and produced.

SCENES 1 to 78

Story and Scenario by SCOTT DARLING

Photographed by FRANCIS CORBY

Produced by WILLIAM WATSON

Presenting

HARRY GRIFFON

in

"WHOSE LITTLE BABY ARE YOU?"

SUB. 1—THE BEGINNING OF A PERFECT DAY.

SCENE 1—BEDROOM

Harry in bed—he stretches and starts to get up—

SUB. 2—A HAPPY MARRIED MAN OF TWO WEEKS' STANDING, HARRY GRIFFON.

# P H O T O P L A Y   W R I T I N G

## SCENE 2—CLOSEUP HARRY

*As he yawns and looks at the clock—yep—time to get up—he starts to get up—*

## SCENE 3—BEDROOM

*He has either a pair of pajamas on or a long nightshirt—he starts out—*

SUB. 3—HIS BRIDE, WHO THINKS HER HUSBAND IS TOO WONDERFUL FOR WORDS, LAURA LA PLANTE.

## SCENE 4—CLOSE SHOT ON BRIDE IN KITCHEN

*She is getting Harry's morning meal ready—*

## SCENE 5—AT FRONT DOOR

*Paper lying on porch—as Harry opens the door and attempts to reach out and grab the paper—the wind blows it further away—Harry sticks out his head and takes a peek around and looks out further and makes another grab for it but the wind blows it further away than ever—Harry takes a cautious look around—nobody in sight and steps out of the door to reach for the paper—he almost has it—*

## SCENE 6—CLOSE SHOT ON DOOR

*As it slowly closes—and shuts—*

## SCENE 7—FULL SHOT. FRONT DOOR

*As Harry turns and finds to his dismay that door is locked—he tries furiously to open it—*

## SCENE 8—SIDEWALK

*Old maid comes along and sees, says, "horror," and shrieks—*

## SCENE 9—AT FRONT DOOR

*Harry hears her shriek and turns wildly around—he tries to cover up his bare shanks—he turns and hammers frantically on the door—*

## SCENE 10—KITCHEN

*His wife is up to her neck in work—she calls off—*

## A MOTION-PICTURE COMEDY SCRIPT

---

SUBTITLE 4: "OH, HARRY!—THERE'S SOMEBODY AT THE FRONT DOOR."

### SCENE 11—KITCHEN

She goes on complacently working away at the dough or what ever it is—

### SCENE 12—FRONT DOOR

Harry is still frantically hammering away—he looks toward the sidewalk again—much ashamed—

### SCENE 13—SIDEWALK

Minister walking past—he is watching Harry—he covers his eyes and says Merciful Heavens and walks on quickly—

### SCENE 14—FRONT DOOR

Harry does more hammering—

### SCENE 15—KITCHEN

His wife sore—stops her work and goes—

### SCENE 16—AT FRONT DOOR

Harry still hammering as the door opens and his wife appears—rushes in—

## UNUSED PART OF CONTINUITY OF CHAPTER 13

### SCENE 17—HALLWAY

His wife is flabbergasted as Harry says, My God, I've been waiting there for an hour—his wife starts to laugh—he says it is no laughing matters—and stamps out to his room—while she takes another direction to the kitchen—

SUBTITLE 5: THEN HARRY'S WILD UNCLE FROM THE WILD, WILD WEST ARRIVED.

### SCENE 18—RAILWAY STATION

Uncle gets off the train and has an immediate argument with two red-caps whom he thinks are going to steal his baggage—they convince him that everything is all right—and all start out—



## A MOTION-PICTURE COMEDY SCRIPT

---

old lady comes into scene—Harry asks her would she mind holding the baby while he ties his shoe—she takes it and Harry leans down to tie his shoe—he starts to tie first one—then the other—getting away two or three paces each time—

### SCENE 47—CLOSEUP WOMAN AND BABY

As she lifts up the covers and takes a look and finds it is a negro baby—she is horror stricken.

### SCENE 48—LONG SHOT

Harry is still stepping away from the scene—tying his shoe—as woman lets out a yell—Harry stops—thinks he will beat it when a cop appears in the offing—and he walks back to the woman—thanks her with a ceremonious bow and then walks off—as the woman stares after him open mouth—

### SCENE 49—EXTERIOR HOUSE

Little boy on ringing bell—with a bunch of postcards in his hand—he has a baby in a go-cart with him—as the door opens and the wife comes out—the boy asks her if she will buy some postcards—she leans down and looks at the baby—

### SCENE 50—CLOSEUP WIFE

As she plays with the baby—turns to the boy and says—*Subtitle*

SUBTITLE 12: "I'LL BUY ALL YOUR CARDS IF YOU'LL LET ME TAKE CARE OF THE BABY ALL DAY."

### SCENE 51—AT FRONT DOOR

The boy says all right—and hands over the cards—while the wife takes the baby and starts inside with them—

SUBTITLE 13: WHILE TOGO FIGURED HE COULD USE THAT MONEY HIMSELF, AND BORROWED ONE OF HIS OWN.

### SCENE 52—EXTERIOR HOUSE

Jap comes out with baby under his arm and goes—

### SCENE 53—SIDE OF HOUSE

Gibbon comes sneaking in with the negro baby and climbs in a window with it—

## SCENARIO WRITING

### SCENE 54—BEDROOM

Harry puts the negro baby down on the bed—and sneaks out again—

### SCENE 55—EXTERIOR SIDE OF HOUSE

Harry drops down again from window—he says to himself—now to find a white baby—thinks for a moment and then starts off—

### SCENE 56—EXTERIOR HOUSE

Wife comes out with the baby in her arms and the boy stuffs some money in his pockets and goes—wife dandles the baby up and down—and then goes into the house—

### SCENE 57—BACK DOOR

The Jap with the baby under his arm knocking at the back door—

### SCENE 58—KITCHEN

Wife comes in with the baby under her arm—hears the knocking and opens door—and Jap comes in with the baby and says to her—see I got the baby for you—Wife says but I've got one already—Jap gets sore—and starts to spring a lot of Japanese on her—he says—

SUBTITLE 14: "YOU SAY GET A BABY AN' I GET ONE—NOW YOU KEEP HIM OR I BE VERY 'DAM' MAD."

### SCENE 59—KITCHEN

The wife is scared at this and doesn't say a word as the Jap puts the baby down on the table and stalks indignantly out—Wife worried—doesn't know what to do—she picks up the Jap baby and goes into next room with it—

### SCENE 60—BEDROOM

Nigger baby playing on the bed—as wife comes in—takes one look at the nigger baby on the bed—then at the Jap baby on one arm and the white baby on the other—she lays them down on the bed—all along side each other—then says—*Subtitle*

SUBTITLE 15: "EENEY—MEENEY—MINEY—MO!"

## A MOTION-PICTURE COMEDY SCRIPT

---

### SCENE 61—BEDROOM

It is too much for her—she whirls and falls into her chair almost hysterical—

SUBTITLE 16: THE LOGICAL WAY OUT!

### SCENE 62—EXTERIOR ORPHANAGE HOME

Harry comes out with the baby—he has adopted—a proud papa—a nurse can come to the gate to bid him good-bye if necessary—Harry goes off—satisfied that everything is fine now—

### SCENE 63—ROADSIDE

Uncle sitting on the running board of the car while chauffeur is fixing a puncture—he is very impatient—

### SCENE 64—EXTERIOR HOUSE

Harry comes rushing on—not a sight of uncle—tickled to death he rushes into the house—

### SCENE 65—BEDROOM

Wife hears Harry come in—tucks the kids in a row—and then marches out to break the news—

### SCENE 66—LIVING-ROOM

Harry comes rushing on with the baby in his arms—yells honey where are you as his wife comes in—

### SCENE 67—CLOSEUP WIFE

As she stops and sees the fourth baby—she brushes her hand over her eyes—My God, another one—

### SCENE 68—CLOSEUP HARRY

As he holds up the baby and says—see dear all our troubles are over—

### SCENE 69—FULL SHOT—LIVING-ROOM

Wife takes one look at him—she beckons to the bedroom—come, I have something to show you in there—Harry says—yes, dear, I know about that—she says, you know about it do you—well come and take a look—she hauls him toward the bedroom—



**SCENE 70—BEDROOM**

Three kids in a row on the bed—as Harry and wife comes in—  
—Harry takes one look—

**SCENE 71—CLOSEUP THREE KIDS ON BED**

*As they do some cute business of some kind—*

**SCENE 72—FULL SHOT—BEDROOM**

*As Harry nearly drops his baby as he says, My God—where did they all come from—as wife says—*

**SUBTITLE 17: "I HAVE BEEN JUST AS BUSY AS YOU HAVE—I HOPE YOU'RE SATISFIED."**

**SCENE 73—BACK TO SCENE**

*As Harry puts his hand to his head—then lays the other child down beside the others—*

**SCENE 74—AT FRONT DOOR**

*Uncle on rapping—very brusque and impatient—*

**SCENE 75—BEDROOM**

*Harry and the wife both take it—it's Uncle—both pick up a baby and start to rush out—one has a nigger and the other has the Jap—they both notice their mistake—they put down the colored children and both pick up a white one—then Harry stops—don't you bring one as they rush out again—*

**SCENE 76—AT FRONT DOOR**

*Uncle impatient—gives the bell another ring—as the door opens and Harry and wife appear—Harry with the baby in his arms—all tickled to death—as Uncle greets them boisterously and then all go into house—*

**SCENE 77—LIVING-ROOM**

*All come in—as Uncle says, so this is little Oswald—he reaches over and takes him—Harry gives his wife a dig in the ribs—as he says—Subtitle—*

**SUBTITLE 18: "DON'T YOU THINK HE LOOKS LIKE UNCLE OSWALD?"**

**SCENE 78—LIVING-ROOM**

*Wife takes it with a start—as she says—"Oh, yes—yes—"*

## CHAPTER XIV

### AN INDIRECT MARKET FOR SCENARIOS

**M**ANY beginners who have despaired of marketing their scenarios directly have achieved success through an indirect method. They have first sold their stories in short-story form to one of the big magazines and then disposed of the motion picture rights.

Almost all scenario editors will give the benefit of the doubt to a story that has been published. The fact that an editor who has built up a circulation of hundreds of thousands for his magazine has thought that the story would appeal to his wide circle of readers has great weight with him. In fact, some writers have had this amazing experience. They have submitted photoplay synopses to a scenario editor who turned them down. They have then amplified their synopses, rewritten their material in short-story form and sold them to magazines, afterwards disposing of the motion picture rights to the same scenario editor who had previously turned them down.

In selling a story to a magazine, it is necessary to reserve the motion picture rights or they will belong to the magazine that publishes the story. "Motion picture rights reserved" should be typed on the title page of every story submitted to a magazine.

That the short story is taking the place of the novel as a basis for motion pictures is the declaration

SCENE 70—BEDROOM

Three kids in a row on the bed—as Harry and wife comes in—  
—Harry takes one look—

SCENE 71—CLOSEUP THREE KIDS ON BED

As they do some cute business of some kind—

SCENE 72—FULL SHOT—BEDROOM

As Harry nearly drops his baby as he says, My God—where  
did they all come from—as wife says—

SUBTITLE 17: "I HAVE BEEN JUST AS BUSY AS YOU  
HAVE—I HOPE YOU'RE SATISFIED."

SCENE 73—BACK TO SCENE

As Harry puts his hand to his head—then lays the other child  
down beside the others—

SCENE 74—AT FRONT DOOR

Uncle on rapping—very brusque and impatient—

SCENE 75—BEDROOM

Harry and the wife both take it—it's Uncle—both pick up a  
baby and start to rush out—one has a nigger and the other has the  
Jap—they both notice their mistake—they put down the colored  
children and both pick up a white one—then Harry stops—don't  
you bring one as they rush out again—

SCENE 76—AT FRONT DOOR

Uncle impatient—gives the bell another ring—as the door  
opens and Harry and wife appear—Harry with the baby in his  
arms—all tickled to death—as Uncle greets them boisterously and  
then all go into house—

SCENE 77—LIVING-ROOM

All come in—as Uncle says, so this is little Oswald—he  
reaches over and takes him—Harry gives his wife a dig in the ribs—  
as he says—*Subtitle*—

SUBTITLE 18: "DON'T YOU THINK HE LOOKS LIKE  
UNCLE OSWALD?"

SCENE 78—LIVING-ROOM

Wife takes it with a start—as she says—"Oh, yes—yes—"

## CHAPTER XIV

### AN INDIRECT MARKET FOR SCENARIOS

**M**ANY beginners who have despaired of marketing their scenarios directly have achieved success through an indirect method. They have first sold their stories in short-story form to one of the big magazines and then disposed of the motion picture rights.

Almost all scenario editors will give the benefit of the doubt to a story that has been published. The fact that an editor who has built up a circulation of hundreds of thousands for his magazine has thought that the story would appeal to his wide circle of readers has great weight with him. In fact, some writers have had this amazing experience. They have submitted photoplay synopses to a scenario editor who turned them down. They have then amplified their synopses, rewritten their material in short-story form and sold them to magazines, afterwards disposing of the motion picture rights to the same scenario editor who had previously turned them down.

In selling a story to a magazine, it is necessary to reserve the motion picture rights or they will belong to the magazine that publishes the story. "Motion picture rights reserved" should be typed on the title page of every story submitted to a magazine.

That the short story is taking the place of the novel as a basis for motion pictures is the declaration

of many authorities in film circles. The general assumption has been that the short story is too limited in its text, plot and descriptive matter to permit of its transformation into a motion picture. It has been pointed out that when any form of literature has contributed to the screen in the past it has been the novel. It is now claimed that the short story more ideally approaches in brevity and swiftness of action the standard set by the scenario editors, and that this makes for better results.

The prediction is made that in the future production heads will turn more to the short story and its writer as contributors for photoplay material. One reason for this situation is that now every available novel ever written has been used in one form or another for the screen. The writings of that master plotter, Charles Dickens, if not used as Dickens prepared them, have been revised, rewritten and released in pictures under another title. This rule has been followed with the works of other masters of literature, from the past to the present. So the output of popular novels is limited for it takes time and thought to prepare a literary work in commercial length for novelization. The producers of motion pictures cannot wait for the limited number of adaptable novels published per year, because with regular releases the demand for material is always increasing.

Up to about 1918 the filming of a short story was the exception rather than the rule. Today the careful consideration of short stories appearing in magazines and newspapers is a prime necessity. They are

read and considered for the plot ideas contained and then elaborated with added dramatic situations are developed into feature film plays.

By studying the releases of 1921-22 you will readily perceive that the short story has become an important foundation for photoplays. Many of the posters announcing the appearance of a picture contain an announcement like this, following the main title:—"Adapted from the story by \_\_\_\_\_ appearing in the \_\_\_\_\_ magazine."

You will readily understand that with the trend of the short story market toward filmland it is only a question of time when the free lance writer with plots of freshness and originality to market will come more largely into his own. The market demands material and with the scramble for short stories, more careful consideration is being given to the outside contributory, not so much for the literary excellence of their stories as for the ideas or plots contained therein.

"Freshness and originality" are generalities, perhaps, but they have an important meaning nevertheless. The best we can do is to try to put something new and fresh into an old plot or an old situation. For example, for years the eastern tenderfoot went west and became a cowboy. Then one day a writer had an idea and had the western cowboy leave the range and become an eastern tenderfoot. This was merely the reversing of an old situation, yet it had the element of originality, and for a while we had the western cowboy regularly going east.

trying to practice medicine or survey a railroad route or enter a courtroom to administer the law without having had long and careful training. The same is true of writing. Jack London made it a rule in his later years to write not more than one thousand words in a day and he wrote from eight o'clock in the morning until twelve o'clock noon, six days in the week. You may think that in four hours one could write several times one thousand words. If you are an expert typist you can easily do so, but the result will be just words. London wrote his one thousand words and then rewrote them, and then next, according to his own statement, he frequently tore down and rewrote his previous day's work, which had seemed perfect to him when he finished it first.

Literary work is hard work, exacting work. It requires toil, patience, education and worldly experience, not to speak of talent. You cannot write unless you have something to write about. In order to have something to write about you must have lived, you must have felt, to some extent the emotions which you attempt to put in writing and which you expect other people to read and appreciate, people, it may be, who have experienced the same emotions you are trying to portray.

If your writing is not convincing, true and sincere, then your work is simply artificial and just words.



(Palm)

"THRILLS" IS THE MIDDLE NAME OF THE SERIAL WRITER, AND UNLESS YOU CAN DEVISE SITUATIONS LIKE THIS ONE FROM "THE HOUSE OF HATE," IN WHICH FEARL WHITE APPEARED, YOU CAN'T WRITE THE "CONTINUED NEXT WEEK" TYPE OF STORY





RUPERT HUGHES IS ONE OF THE FEW AUTHORS WHO HAS GONE INTO A MOTION PICTURE STUDIO AND MADE GOOD IN WRITING DIRECT FOR THE SCREEN

## CHAPTER XV, HOW CENSORSHIP AFFECTS THE WRITER

**B**EFORE going any further into the essentials of motion picture play writing, it would be well to outline what *not* to write. In other words, what the requirements of censorship are.

The censoring of motion pictures is, in our opinion, unconstitutional but that is beside the point. Boards of Censors exist in different cities and states, and there is a National Board and so have to be taken into consideration. The National Board was created some years ago by the motion-picture manufacturers for mutual protection, and to this National Board has been submitted every motion picture production that has been shown within the past four or five years. However, this National Board of Motion Picture Censors gave an idea to various political groups in states and cities, a plan for creating soft positions for the political faithful.

Among the states having boards of censors which must examine any and all films shown in every commonwealth are Ohio, Pennsylvania, New York, Kansas, and a few others. Some of the cities have gone the states one better and have created their individual boards of censors. The city of Chicago is a notable example.

The censoring of motion pictures in the states and

cities has cost motion-picture producers hundreds of thousands of dollars, and it would be just as constitutional to have censors appointed to dictate what shall go into a newspaper or book, as it is to dictate what shall appear on the screen. We all know there are rules of decency governing the printed word, and there are laws which would take care of any motion-picture production, or any spoken drama, or any book which was offensive. So why censors would be wished on the motion picture industry is a question that has never been satisfactorily answered, except by saying that censorship provides additional political positions for political workers.

The censorship boards of the states of Ohio and Pennsylvania are perhaps, the most drastic, and the Chicago board is, we think, the sternest of civic organizations of its kind.

There was never any censorship imposed on the old time "penny dreadful" or the "dime novel," in which murder, sudden death, and the blood and thunder peculiarly attractive to juveniles was turned out in quantities. But the motion-picture serial, which has, in a way, supplanted the dime novel, and which in most cases has not been nearly so sensational, has been discriminated against until today it is almost impossible to produce a chapter film play in which any sensationalism whatsoever, whether it be adventure or otherwise, is permissible. In fact, a leading member of a censorship board has stated to the author of this volume that he would prefer that no serials whatever be produced.

So you see, it is well to know what *not* to write in order not to waste effort.

For example, here is a list of censorship eliminations made from the first chapter of a popular serial produced in 1921. These eliminations were made by the Pennsylvania State Board of Censors.

### Reel 1.

- A. Elim. Subtitle: "Go back and climb the fire escape and stand by if they need help."
- B. Elim. All views of man climbing fire escape to enter building. Allow where he falls off only.
- C. Elim. Subtitle: "What a swell night for a murder."
- D. Elim. Views of policeman actually shooting up fire escape.

### Reel 2.

- A. Elim. Subtitle: "Keep those mitts up or I'll shoot."
- B. Elim. Views of girl with pistol on man in hotel room and views of girl felling man by striking him with pistol butt.
- C. Elim. Views of girl with pistol waiting to shoot.
- D. Elim. Closeups of girl with pistol.
- E. Reduce to flash of two feet views of man waiting to assault another with club raised. This is on hotel roof at the corner of house.

F. Reduce to one flash of two feet view of girl climbing fire escape with pistol in hand.

G. Elim. All views of girl shooting up fire escape.

But the serial, which we have taken up in detail in another chapter, is not the only production which is discriminated against by the censors. Here is a list of eliminations ordered upon a two reel film drama by a state board of censors. This will prove interesting and instructive to all ambitious writers.

Reel 1.

A. Elim. All closeups and near views of the Lone Rider with cowl over face.

B. Elim. All views of the cowed rider holding up stage coach; also subsequent views of him with gun on three men after they have been forced from the stage coach.

C. Elim. Closeup view of the cowl rider on horseback.

D. Elim. View of man on horseback, masked. Show him only after mask has been pulled from his face.

Reel 2.

E. Elim. Views of masked men jumping from tree fighting detectives, except part of fight where masked men has back to camera.

- D. Elim. Views of masked man putting another over a horse, and later of masked man after he sends horse and rider away.
- E. Elim. View of masked man on horse dismounting and going to girl, struggling with her and later when detective joins in fight, excepting the end of fight where detective overcomes masked man.
- F. Elim. Views of masked man where girl goes to him and later embraces him.
- G. Reduce struggle of which there are four views by eliminating two of them, allowing the first and last.
- H. Elim. Views of girl actually hitting man on the head with a rock.

Whatever argument is propounded against censorship, and however logical it is from a constitutional point of view, it should be remembered that it is far better to write what is clean and good in drama than to try to invent action which is unwholesome. It is a strange truth, discovered by the author, who has read hundreds of thousands of manuscripts, that it is women who seem to be inclined to write motion picture plots having to do with sex problems. Some of the most salacious stories, the authors of which are taking a chance in sending them through the mails, are written by women.

Why not try to raise the motion picture to a higher plane? Just because you read an article in the morning newspaper containing the details of an illicit lov-

## CHAPTER XVI

### HOW TO PREPARE YOUR MANUSCRIPT

**I**T is most important that your manuscript look well; anyone who has faced the pile of scenarios that heap themselves up on an editor's desk will testify that it's the neat, clean, business-like looking manuscripts toward which he has the most kindly feeling.

No longer can even the most ignorant person declare that the story which is scribbled on the back of an envelope or the cover of a cigar box has as good a chance of being accepted as has the well typed scenario. It has a far better chance of being thrown aside without being actually read at all.

Nor has the story which is written out in longhand much chance, no matter how neat and legible the writing may be. A story must be typewritten—that is the first rule. There's no getting around it. If you *can't borrow or rent or buy a machine yourself*, and have no friend who will type your story for you, and can't afford to pay the price asked by a professional typist, perhaps at a business college you can get one of the students to copy it, making one carbon copy, at less than the professional typist's rates.

*Use white paper, of the standard manuscript size eight and one-half by eleven inches, and, though it need not be heavy bond paper, it must not be too flimsy. For \$1.25 a ream—five hundred sheets—you can buy paper of the right quality.*



(Left: Natchez)

STORIES FOR NORMA TAYLOR MUST HAVE BIG  
EMOTIONAL SCENES





THE BARRY MEYER SHOW IS THE ONLY ONE OF ITS KIND  
WITH NO CENSORSHIP

You can use the yellow second sheets for your carbon copy, as you would not in any event submit a carbon copy to an editor, and so would have to re-copy it if the first copy should be lost.

*It seems hardly necessary to state that you should use only one side of the paper, and the typing should be neat, with out pencilled corrections or inserts.*

Put your name and address in the left hand corner of each page of your manuscript—your own name, even though you may sign a *nom de plume* to your story. On the first, the title page, write your name and address in the upper left hand corner, and the name of your story, in capitals, in the middle of the page. On the next page the title will appear about one-third of the way from the top of the page, in the middle, and the story will begin below it.

Let your margins be wide enough so that the script looks well; a margin of one inch and a quarter at the left side of the page and one inch at the right will do. There should be a two inch margin at the top of the page and a margin of an inch and a half at the bottom. The pages should be numbered in the middle.

Do not fasten the sheets of your manuscript together with a clip that cannot be easily removed. Anyone who has struggled through a manuscript that is clamped together so that the paper has to be torn to separate the sheets, will emphasize this. Use a clip that can easily be removed, and replaced when the story has been read.

Double space your manuscript, so as to make it as easy to read as possible. You must remember always

that the scenario editor has many scripts to read, and little time—therefore he will be most likely to read first the manuscripts which, because of their appearance, appeal to him. A professional writer sees to it that his manuscripts look well. He wants them to make as favorable an appearance as possible. *Make your story look as if you had taken pains with it—if you want the scenario editor to take pains too.*

Do not fasten the stamps which you enclose for the return of your manuscript to the manuscript itself. It is best to enclose an envelope, properly stamped and addressed to you, with your story instead of enclosing stamps.

Use an envelope which necessitates your folding your manuscript across twice, never more than that, and be sure that this envelope is large enough to hold the return envelope, and heavy enough to withstand possible rough handling in the mails. In addressing the outer envelope, put your own name and address in the upper left corner, and that of the scenario editor in the middle of the space.

When your story is typed, be sure that it is standard in appearance—that is, that it is not typed in script, or in very small letters, or very large ones. Let it be conspicuous because of its neatness, not because of any tricks of typing or spacing. Your story must be the thing that demands attention—not the manner of its presentation.

## CHAPTER XVII.

### HOW A STORY IS HANDLED.

**T**HE history of a motion picture story from its receipt by the scenario editor in his office until it becomes a completed production will, no doubt, be of interest to the layman.

Let us take a story in synopsis form and watch its travels from the moment it arrives at the motion picture studio until it is released in the movie theatre.

Through the mail comes, perhaps, a plot in synopsis form, written by James Ebenezer Moon of Pleasant Grove, Ohio. The envelope containing the manuscript is opened in the course of business and, in most studios, goes direct to the reading department. In this department readers experienced in the art of recognizing plots and well acquainted with the policy of the company with which they are affiliated, separate the wheat from the chaff. The name of James Ebenezer Moon means nothing to these readers. Frankly, the name is a handicap. Were the author one of wide reputation in fiction or motion picture play writing, it would read primarily and Mr. Moon's effusion be set aside until the reader had leisure to peruse it. However, during the course of the day's work the reader comes to Mr. Moon's story. This story may be entitled "Her Sacrifice" or "Mother Love" or some other of the good old standbys which are scanned with a cold and cynical



but that the idea and perhaps several of the climaxes in the plot are salable. He takes the story up with the general manager of the studio and outlines the idea to him. The general manager O. K.'s its purchase.

And one day James Ebenezer Moon, who, perhaps, dispenses soda water in a Pleasant Grove drug store, or teaches school, or clerks in the Bon Ton Drygoods Store on Main Street, receives a letter from the film company to which he sent his manuscript. Perhaps this manuscript has already been returned by one or two other film companies, and so James Ebenezer knows by the weight of the envelope that it does not contain a rejected manuscript. He rushes back behind the prescription counter of the drug store, leaving three or four thirsty patrons without their soda, and hurriedly tears open the envelope and reads something along this line:

Dear Sir:

We have read your story entitled "PLAYTHINGS OF FATE" and think we may be able to use the idea contained therein. We are enclosing herewith a waiver which you may sign and return to us when a check for two hundred dollars, in payment for the rights to your story, will go forward to you.

If James Ebenezer Moon were an experienced writer he would give this two hundred dollar check statement the merry laugh and come right back with

eye by the studio reader, who probably in the course of a week has seen these titles hundreds of times.

Mr. Moon's story hangs in the balance at this juncture. First, he is an unknown author; second, he comes across with a stereotyped and ancient title. Naturally the reader will be inclined to think that the plot which follows is ancient and stereotyped also. He runs his experienced eye quickly over the first page of the manuscript. Its composition, its manner of stating the vital items of the story in the first paragraph—hitting the reader between the eyes, as it were, causes this cynical reader to show some interest. He reads on; he likes the idea, why? Because it contains a novel twist to an old situation—there is nothing new in the plot line; there is perhaps, enthusiasm or individuality evident in the writing of the plot; the story can be produced with a reasonable expenditure of money; it is so presented that it might fit the peculiar needs and suit the characteristics of some male or female star in the company for which he reads.

So, on interoffice correspondence paper, the reader writes a note to the scenario editor recommending that he read James Ebenezer's story—that it "contains possibilities." In due time the manuscript arrives on the desk of the editor in chief. Perhaps it is the one out of one hundred stories that have gone through the reading department that day and that has reached the office of the final arbiter. The editor in chief reads Mr. Moon's story. He likes it. He sees possibilities in it for a five reel program feature. He decides that the incidental business is not so much,

but that the idea and perhaps several of the climaxes in the plot are salable. He takes the story up with the general manager of the studio and outlines the idea to him. The general manager O. K.'s its purchase.

. And one day James Ebenezer Moon, who, perhaps, dispenses soda water in a Pleasant Grove drug store, or teaches school, or clerks in the Bon Ton Drygoods Store on Main Street, receives a letter from the film company to which he sent his manuscript. Perhaps this manuscript has already been returned by one or two other film companies, and so James Ebenezer knows by the weight of the envelope that it does not contain a rejected manuscript. He rushes back behind the prescription counter of the drug store, leaving three or four thirsty patrons without their soda, and hurriedly tears open the envelope and reads something along this line:

Dear Sir:

We have read your story entitled "PLAYTHINGS OF FATE" and think we may be able to use the idea contained therein. We are enclosing herewith a waiver which you may sign and return to us when a check for two hundred dollars, in payment for the rights to your story, will go forward to you.

If James Ebenezer Moon were an experienced writer he would give this two hundred dollar check statement the merry laugh and come right back with



A continuity writer works on salary; ranging from one hundred per week, minimum, to two hundred dollars per week.

The continuity is delivered and in some cases, after it is read and suggestions made by the editor-in-chief, it is rewritten. It is then handed to the director to "shoot as per script." In some studios there is a very good system under which, after a continuity is delivered and conferred upon by the editor and the writer, the director and the star are called in and asked for suggestions on the story, and if these are of worth, they are embodied in the script before it is "shot."

After the continuity is finally approved it is manifolded and copies go to the different departments interested—the casting office; the production department; the director, the director's assistant; the files in the general office and in the scenario department office; to the star; to the property department, the titling department, and elsewhere.

The casting director reads the script and selects the types for the story to support the star. In many instances the star and the director are consulted on this also, depending in a measure upon the personality of the star and the director.

The production department arranges for the interior sets necessary and for the exterior locations; and estimates the cost of the production including the cost of the cast, the cost of sets, the salaries of the cast, director, story, continuity, etc. This department studies the script for the properties, that is, the

furnishings of rooms, and all other items necessary for the business and the upbuilding of the drama. The assistant director has a script in order to be able to lay out the daily work for the director. There are a total number of scenes to be shot and it is the work of the director and his assistant to so divide the story in continuity that a certain number of scenes in similar locations can be photographed every day, thus saving long jumps here and there and waste of time. Often the very end of the story will be photographed first and the beginning will be the last sequence to be shot.

After the work of production starts, the director and his assistants see the daily "rushes," that is, every evening they congregate in one of the many projection rooms of the studio and see the positive prints of the negative photographed the day before on the screen. Thus, with technical experts with them they are able to judge whether the photography is good or bad; whether the light is good or bad, if the make-up of the characters is realistic, and whether the sets are all that should be desired. Very often "retakes" are ordered because of bad photography, etc.

As the director progresses with his work, and a five reel picture should be completed in from four to six weeks, the film editor starts to work assembling the sample positive print. In this sample positive print the sketch titles, that is, the original titles from the continuity are inserted. For a five reel program picture the commercial length is approximately forty-six hundred feet. Very frequently the director

will expose ten to twenty-five thousand feet of film. When all this material is assembled, the best photographic shots of the two cameras usually used are chosen and the entire production is run in what is called "first cut" or "rough assembly." This may be seven or eight thousand feet in length.

Now the film editor and the title editor start to work cutting down this positive, writing finished titles, for the titles as contained in the continuity are rarely retained in their first form; and in the end Ebenezer Moon's masterpiece, "Playthings of Fate," appears under a new main title, and when Mr. Moon sees the picture he is at a loss to know what, if anything, remains of his story which the film company purchased.

After the production is passed in its finished state by the editor of the studio, the sample prints and the negative are sometimes shipped to the New York office of the company, where they are again viewed and minor changes made; or, if the production does not suit, it is sent back to the studio for changes or retakes. Then prints are made from the original negative and distributed to the film exchanges of the company.

The popularity of the star determines the number of prints which are made primarily. Each exchange may get one print or it may get two or more. Occasionally a picture proves more popular than was expected and then additional prints must be made from time to time. The owner of the moving-picture theatre goes to the exchange and views the picture

and "books" it for a certain rental sum. This rental also depends upon the popularity of the star, the more popular star with an enormous drawing power naturally costing the exhibitor more rental than the usual program picture star.

When the picture is finally presented in the Idle Hour Theatre in Pleasant Grove and Mr. Moon and his admiring friends view it, his name appears under the title of the picture as author. This is a custom invariably followed, no matter what radical changes have been made in the original idea.

And this is the history of the gyrations of the moving-picture story from the time it reaches the moving-picture studio until it appears on the screen.

will expose ten to twenty-five thousand feet of film. When all this material is assembled, the best photographic shots of the two cameras usually used are chosen and the entire production is run in what is called "first cut" or "rough assembly." This may be seven or eight thousand feet in length.

Now the film editor and the title editor start to work cutting down this positive, writing finished titles, for the titles as contained in the continuity are rarely retained in their first form; and in the end Ebenezer Moon's masterpiece, "Playthings of Fate," appears under a new main title, and when Mr. Moon sees the picture he is at a loss to know what, if anything, remains of his story which the film company purchased.

After the production is passed in its finished state by the editor of the studio, the sample prints and the negative are sometimes shipped to the New York office of the company, where they are again viewed and minor changes made; or, if the production does not suit, it is sent back to the studio for changes or retakes. Then prints are made from the original negative and distributed to the film exchanges of the company.

The popularity of the star determines the number of prints which are made primarily. Each exchange may get one print or it may get two or more. Occasionally a picture proves more popular than was expected and then additional prints must be made from time to time. The owner of the moving-picture theatre goes to the exchange and views the picture

and "books" it for a certain rental sum. This rental also depends upon the popularity of the star, the more popular star with an enormous drawing power naturally costing the exhibitor more rental than the usual program picture star.

When the picture is finally presented in the Idle Hour Theatre in Pleasant Grove and Mr. Moon and his admiring friends view it, his name appears under the title of the picture as author. This is a custom invariably followed, no matter what radical changes have been made in the original idea.

And this is the history of the gyrations of the moving-picture story from the time it reaches the moving-picture studio until it appears on the screen.

## CHAPTER XVIII

### THE LANGUAGE OF THE SCREEN

**T**HE worker in the motion-picture studio has a lexicon all his own, a parlance comparatively newly coined but in common use among those engaged in the writing and producing of motion pictures. To begin with, although the very industry is founded upon the photographic art, yet seldom does one hear the word photography used. When the camera man goes forth with the director and his company to photograph scenes for a motion picture, in the language of the studio he "shoots" the scenes. And when the photographing of the picture has been completed it has been "shot." If an inquiry is made for some member of a company at a studio the reply is given that so and so's company is "shooting" to-day, or that "shooting" has been finished.

When the members of a motion-picture company are engaged in photographing a picture at the studio, they are said to be "shooting on the lot." When they are absent at some distant point perhaps photographing certain scenes for a picture, they are "on location."

A great deal of theatrical parlance has been handed down to the motion-picture industry for the reason that the majority of the directors of motion pictures are former directors of the spoken drama, as

are a majority of the motion-picture supporting casts of today.

Invariably a man who plays a villain's role is known as a "heavy." The man or woman who plays the leading heroic part is known as the male or female "lead." The leading fun maker, man or woman, supplying the real or alleged humor, is known as the "comedy lead," etc.

There is an invisible but none the less distinct line drawn between the professional and other players in a motion picture. In the studio the "old stagers," as they call themselves, that is, the actors and actresses who have had long experience in the spoken drama before the motion picture became universally popular, have an aristocracy among themselves. Their contempt for the actor in the motion-picture drama who has had no stage experience may be hidden but it is no less real. Their attitude is something akin to that of the professional baseball player in the big leagues who is said to work better and have more confidence in and respect for a manager who has been on the big circuit than for one who has come up from the bush leagues and has never played in the big leagues. It is true there are a number of motion-picture stars in the business today who have never played in the spoken drama. These are mostly of the feminine sex and have made their way upward in the celluloid drama because of striking photographic qualities and wonderful screen personality. It is a fact, however, that such stars are always surrounded by a carefully selected supporting cast com-





company in "The Bells" and also in the United States at the head of his own company. King Baggot, now a director, formerly a motion-picture star, started in the spoken drama. Ernest C. Warde, son of the sturdy old tragedian, Frederick Warde, played for years in his father's company before becoming a motion-picture director. Fred Niblo and others too numerous to mention were former actors or stage directors. The late Sidney Drew was a striking example of the value of stage experience being brought to the screen. The Drew comedies gained in popularity daily. This was in no small measure attributable to the art and knowledge and experience of Mr. Drew, who aided in directing as well as playing the lead in his own comedies. When Sidney Drew passed away the screen sustained a distinct loss from a standpoint of wholesome humor.

In a motion-picture studio and among the writers the scenario is referred to as the "continuity" or as the "script." The director and actors more frequently use the word "script," while the writer of the scenario mentions his "treatment," his "development," his "climaxes," etc. The director usually refers to all these items as "business." The incidental business or little touches so often seen in the picture are "gags."

The captions or subtitles inserted in the picture are rarely alluded to by the title writer as such. They are known as "titles" or "lines."

When a picture is finally approved by the experts in the projection room, the highest term of praise is

that it "goes fast," meaning that there is plenty of action and sustained interest to carry the production through.

Some of the abbreviations and terms used in continuity and in connection with the "shooting" of same are as follows:

A "closeup" or "C.U." in a script means that the camera is moved close to the character being photographed. The "medium closeup" or "Med. C.U." means photographing the character or the set with the camera set at a medium distance. The "long shot" is used when scenes are taken some distance away; the "very long shot" is just what the term implies, a distant view photographed. The "fade in" and "fade out" means fading gradually from one scene into another; and the "iris in" and "iris out" are the same except that the iris shot is shown first a full view and gradually becomes smaller until it disappears. An iris shot is usually used to end a sequence in a play or to denote a lapse of time. To "dissolve" signifies to gradually change the scene from one thing to another without disappearing from the screen and is used when a character has, perhaps, had a dream or vision, or goes back to tell a story which happened previous to the action of the picture. "Double exposure" is expert photography, a long process, calling for artistic ability, used by the camera man when the same character enacts two roles, usually having to do with mistaken identity. In such plays as Dumas' "The Corsican Brothers," "The Great Imper-



(D. W. Griffith)

Of course you know this scene from "Orphans of the Storm," showing Lillian Gish and Monte Blue—but don't try to write a story like this one—or like any other—and sell it to D. W. Griffith, for he is not in the market for originals by amateur writers.



A good boy story is a sure fire hit—like the screen version of "Penrod," the book by Booth Tarkington, screened by Marshall Neelan with Wesley Bitty in the title role

sonation," "The Masquerader," etc., double exposure is essential.

A "flash" in a continuity means three to five feet of film used to "cut back" to keep in the mind of the audience some action or some character which it is proposed to bring in later at the climax. A "run by," never used in continuity, but an expression used in the film editing department, is along the same line, a "chase scene," etc., to be cut in between certain sequences.

"Int." on the continuity means interior scenes, and "Ext." means exterior scenes. Letters, telegrams, newspapers, books or anything of the sort shown in a flash by themselves are known as "inserts."

## CHAPTER XIX TITLING A SEPARATE JOB

THE titling of motion-picture plays, the writing of subtitles, or captions, is a separate and distinct job, distinct from all the work of the scenario department. In fact, of the most difficult branches of motion-picture and the limited number of men and women versed in this knowledge are, with a few exceptions, former newspaper men and newspaper women. They have been drilled in the art of "boiling down" condensing sentences. The beginner in writing always "wordy," writing many sentences and many pages that are unnecessary. They do not know the art of condensation, the making one adjective anywhere a half a dozen might be used, the elimination of superfluous words. A graduate copy reader of any well conducted newspaper can take a thousand word story and, by editing and eliminating, make the same story more telling and more graphic in, perhaps, half the number of words. That is why graduate newspaper people succeed so much more readily in the movie scenario and subtitling games. They have had training in the business, or writing—not in fine writing, but in newspaper English, maybe not the most refined in the world, but English with clear-cut style and that is everyone

Subtitles in motion picture labor under several names, including "lines," "captions," "titles," "leaders," etc. The expressions "titles" or "lines" are the most favored by the professionals. "That's a good line" or "It is a good title" are the more usual comments when an expressive title is written or read.

There are opportunities for the free-lance writer to become a movie title writer. The profession is well paid, but a long course of studio training is essential. No outsider can succeed in writing movie titles unless he has knowledge of studio conditions and has the opportunity to work alongside the director and the film editor. The title editor is becoming more and more recognized as a vitally important cog in the machinery of motion-picture production, and he has finally received the credit so long denied him.

Expressive and rather "fine" writing is essential for motion-picture titles. A sense of the dramatic and a knowledge of continuity is also required. Anyone can write the trite and stock titles, such as "Next day," "That night," "When the shadows of evening fell," etc., but it takes a resourceful titler to originate new lines just as expressive and as readily understood, but getting away from the stereotyped.

The writer of film titles must ever bear in mind that the audiences who pay to see the production he titles are "mixed" audiences. By this we mean that both the educated and uneducated throng the movie theatres and the task of the title writer is to strike a happy medium—to present titles that will be read-





Subtitles in motion picture labor under several names, including "lines," "captions," "titles," "leaders," etc. The expressions "titles" or "lines" are the most favored by the professionals. "That's a good line" or "It is a good title" are the more usual comments when an expressive title is written or read.

There are opportunities for the free-lance writer to become a movie title writer. The profession is well paid, but a long course of studio training is essential. No outsider can succeed in writing movie titles unless he has knowledge of studio conditions and has the opportunity to work alongside the director and the film editor. The title editor is becoming more and more recognized as a vitally important cog in the machinery of motion-picture production, and he has finally received the credit so long denied him.

Expressive and rather "fine" writing is essential for motion-picture titles. A sense of the dramatic and a knowledge of continuity is also required. Anyone can write the trite and stock titles, such as "Next day," "That night," "When the shadows of evening fell," etc., but it takes a resourceful titler to originate new lines just as expressive and as readily understood, but getting away from the stereotyped.

The writer of film titles must ever bear in mind that the audiences who pay to see the production he titles are "mixed" audiences. By this we mean that both the educated and uneducated throng the movie theatres and the task of the title writer is to strike a happy medium

present titles that will be read-

ily understood and appreciated by the washerwoman as well as by the college graduate. To do this, honest English is required, and the shorter the adjectives the better.

It is also the task of the title writer to make his titles as short as possible. Ten to fifteen words are best. The long subtitle not only halts the dramatic action of the picture, but makes many people restless. People do not go to the theatre to "read" reading matter, but to see pictorial drama.

The title should be not only clear and expressive and not too long, but it should be so written as to bring as much into the plot and action as possible. The called "egotistical title" which attempts word-acting and tries to impress the reader with the action and cleverness of the writer is yet in evidence, but is becoming a rare thing. It requires much knowledge and talent to write the sort of lines that increase suspense, aid characterization, and follow along the story, covering up some lapse in the picture and, perhaps, "pointing up" a climax.

The titles carried in an original film scenario continuity are not always retained in the complete picture; rather the contrary, in fact. There are several reasons for this. For one thing, the continuity writer, no matter how clever he may be, is not always clever at titles. He invariably thinks he is, but he rules his titles are too numerous, too flowery and too long. He has had training in continuity, but is not specialized in title writing. Also, when his picture is "shot" by the director there are always

less radical changes in the script, which either eliminates titles or necessitates more titles, or changes those already written in. Then the film editor must trim the completed film to commercial footage, which fact also demands changes in titles. Whole sequences may be lifted out of the story; a new ending originated; scenes cut out or switched around; and, in the end, the completed product would indeed be strange and startling had the titles originally appearing in the continuity been retained.

After the production is completed the film is invariably hundreds of feet over commercial length. "Sketch titles," meaning the titles in the original continuity, are introduced into the picture, which is then viewed by the director, the film editor, and the title writer. Suggestions for shaping up the production, eliminating dragging scenes and sequences are discussed and perhaps another set of sketch titles are prepared by the title writer. In the end the title department supplies an entirely new set of titles to carry along, develop and cover the edited production.

The "art" titles, or titles with hand-drawn letters and pictorial embellishments, and the animated titles, formerly so favored by the producer, are slowly but surely giving way again to the good old plain lettered titles without artistic accompaniment. There is a mighty good theory on the part of some producers that the plainly lettered title devoid of "art" or the trick photography is better calculated to carry along the story, for, after all, the play is the thing!

## CHAPTER XX

### THE PHOTOPLAY MARKET, PAST PRESENT AND FUTURE

A COMPARISON of the old days, when twenty-five dollars was considered a top-notch price for an idea for a motion picture, with the present day, when ten thousand dollars is no uncommon sum to be paid for the motion-picture rights of a story, proves that the monetary awards to the writer who would enter this field are fully commensurate with the work.

Had anyone made the statement three years ago that there would be an alarming scarcity of story material for motion pictures he would have been laughed to scorn. But today there is an alarming scarcity of material of worth for motion pictures. Fancy prices have been paid to fiction writers; the "six best sellers" have been sold even before they appeared between the covers of a book; and now there is very little left that has not been done in motion pictures.

The producers have even gone so far as to buy up old stories which were done in pictures five or six years ago. They have destroyed the old negatives and remade these stories, believing that with improved direction, lighting effects, etc., the stories would prove commercially excellent. Right now we can mention a score or more stories that are being

reproduced and which appeared as feature plays some years ago. These include:

"The House of a Thousand Candles"

"The Rosary"

"The Prince Chap"

"The Garden of Allah"

and many others. These are mentioned to give the reader an insight into the fact that if the producer were not short of proper story material he would not be willing to pay good money for stories that had previously appeared in celluloid.

The demand is now and will be in the future for original stories for the motion-picture screen. There can be nothing else but such a demand, for, as already stated, the volume of new books and short stories containing sufficient action is limited, and the screen must have plot material.

Of course, every successful writer writes original stories. In our allusions to the "original" writer or the "original" story, we mean the beginner, the "outsider," as it were, the writer who has, perhaps, no literary experience, or fame, but who possesses the talent to plot.

Despite the fact that the short story writer and the novelist of today are writing with a canny eye directed toward the motion-picture screen—and much of the literary output of the present day is suffering in consequence—the fact remains that the field for the original writer is, indeed, an unlimited one. The day is here when literary reputation will not count so much as what the writer can deliver.

## P H O T O P L A Y   W R I T I N G

The demand is for good, original material and the time has arrived when the free-lance writer is coming into his own.

When entering the market the new writer should observe market requirements. There was a time when the scenario editor was not really an editor. In fact, with a few notable exceptions, the editor wrote nothing himself and did not believe in reading the output of others. Today, however, well informed men and women, people of long experience in the literary as well as the picture game, are holding the editorial desks of the film companies, and it makes no difference to them who submits a story, so long as the story meets requirements.

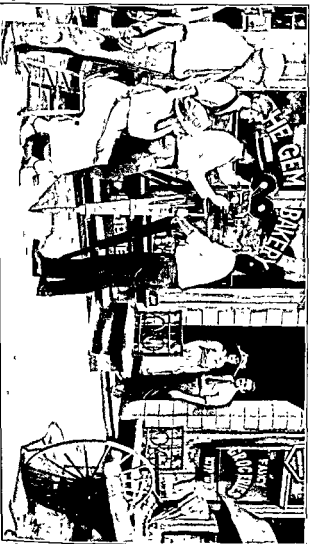
In bringing your wares to the motion-picture market, there are certain essentials that should be rigorously observed.

One of the most important of these is to refrain from including with your manuscript a long personal letter to the editor. Remember he has troubles of his own, and is not interested in the fact that your little sister wants a college education, or that you desire to make a trip to California, and need this particular sum of money for the wherewithal.

It is well to put your full name and address in the upper left hand corner of each page of your manuscript.

Do not try to write motion-picture continuity. This is the work of studio experts, as we have previously explained.

State your thoughts straight from the shoulder.



(First National)

IF YOU CAN LAV YOUR STORIES IN SIMPLE SCENES LIKE THIS ONE FROM "THE  
SONG OF LIFE," IT'S BEST TO DO SO





JEANNIE MACPHERSON IS ONE OF THE MOST SUCCESSFUL  
SCENARIO WRITERS TODAY

Try to avoid word painting, such as "The sun peeped over the brow of the distant hill, and it was dawn." The editor does not care whether it is dawn or not. What he is interested in is your dramatic idea, or plot. It is well to give the editor an insight into the environment or locale of your story, whether, for instance, it is a rural or an urban drama.

What we are trying to bring out is that it is not essential to attempt fine writing. Only try to get your plot on paper in a comprehensive manner. Try to visualize it so that the editor can also visualize it.

There is such a thing as a "synopsis continuity." But in the opinion of the author, this should not be attempted by the beginner in screen writing. A synopsis continuity consists of a story synopsis in steps. That is, paragraph by paragraph, attempting to develop and prolong and emphasize the dramatic value of the plot. This attempt is beneficial to those who have had experience in motion-picture studios, and who can appreciate the salient points of a step synopsis. Others are likely to emphasize non-essentials and thus to lose the real dramatic value of their idea in their effort to write a step synopsis. A synopsis continuity would never be produced as such when submitted by the free-lance writer.

It is well to write your story in a businesslike way, refraining from any technicalities, or attempts at something which can only be successfully presented after long experience in this particular field.

And remember that to successfully market your goods it is necessary to study the market. Read the

motion-picture trade journals. Go to the theatre and study the characteristics and mannerisms of the motion-picture stars. The time has arrived when a general plot suitable for an all-star cast is acceptable. But the "star system" will still be in effect and the star must have story material, so this field offers a bigger market.

If you will watch the work of the leading motion-picture stars, you will see that they have their strength and their weakness. You will notice how situations are built for them and after a time will, perhaps, notice that in many instances these situations carry a similarity. To put it mildly, many of our motion-picture stars have their limitations, and their stories are governed by this.

It is well to carry a note book with you to the theatre. Watch the picture first with a view to embracing the story, plot and atmosphere. Stay for another presentation. In this make notes as to the number of principals engaged; of how they make their entrances and exits; of how climaxes are built up; of how the plot and the atmosphere is handled. It might be well to try to understand the number of scenes and their length; the closeups and other details of technique. You will find this the best education in the world when it comes to gaining a comprehensive knowledge of the motion-picture story.

The great weakness of the beginner in motion-picture writing is that he or she is influenced too much by what has been seen on the screen. We know that a majority of the plots submitted are reminiscent

of motion-picture stories that have gone before, and as such are readily recognized by the editor. Of course, there is nothing new under the sun, but the thing to do is to get a new twist or turn to an old situation, and thus by freshness and originality appeal to the mind of the editor.

motion-picture trade journals. Go to the theatre and study the characteristics and mannerisms of the motion-picture stars. The time has arrived when a general plot suitable for an all-star cast is acceptable. But the "star system" will still be in effect and the star must have story material, so this field offers a bigger market.

If you will watch the work of the leading motion-picture stars, you will see that they have their strength and their weakness. You will notice how situations are built for them and after a time will, perhaps, notice that in many instances these situations carry a similarity. To put it mildly, many of our motion-picture stars have their limitations, and their stories are governed by this.

It is well to carry a note book with you to the theatre. Watch the picture first with a view to embracing the story, plot and atmosphere. Stay for another presentation. In this make notes as to the number of principals engaged; of how they make their entrances and exits; of how climaxes are built up; of how the plot and the atmosphere is handled. It might be well to try to understand the number of scenes and their length; the closeups and other details of technique. You will find this the best education in the world when it comes to gaining a comprehensive knowledge of the motion-picture story.

The great weakness of the beginner in motion-picture writing is that he or she is influenced too much by what has been seen on the screen. We know that a majority of the plots submitted are reminiscent

of motion-picture stories that have gone before, and as such are readily recognized by the editor. Of course, there is nothing new under the sun, but the thing to do is to get a new twist or turn to an old situation, and thus by freshness and originality appeal to the mind of the editor.

## CHAPTER XXI

### HOW AND WHERE TO SELL YOUR SCENARIOS

**D**ON'T be afraid to try to sell your own scenarios. And don't let just anybody with money enough to insert an advertisement in a magazine or newspaper take money from you under the pretense of being able to sell your stories.

There are reliable literary agents, but as a rule they handle only the work of established writers. Some of them will undertake to market the stories of writers of fiction who are just beginners in the literary game, and show promise.

You can sell your own stories, however. Make a careful study of the screen, so that you know what type of story the various producing companies use. For instance, Famous Players-Lasky has used many pictures with a society background, for Gloria Swanson, Ethel Clayton and Betty Compson; it has used clever comedy dramas verging on the serious for Wallace Reid and Thomas Meighan, and some stories with more vivid backgrounds for Dorothy Dalton. It has used westerns for Bill Hart, and and has made no serials or slapstick comedies.

Universal has offered a better field for the outside writer, since it makes many short pictures, and screens

stories of great variety, from the big emotional ones done by Priscilla Dean to comedies and short westerns.

Note the name of the organization which releases a picture—it will be given on the film before the picture actually begins. Then if the picture is based on the type of story that you can do best, get the address of that company and submit your story to its scenario writer.

You will find that a good trade journal is a great help in marketing, as it will enable you to keep track of the companies that are producing and the type of picture which they have found most successful.

The better known trade journals include the Exhibitors Herald of Chicago, The Moving Picture World, the Motion Picture News, the Exhibitors Trade Review, and the Exhibitors Herald of New York City. There are a number of minor publications devoted strictly to the interests of motion pictures, but many of these are merely organs presenting the advantages of some correspondence course and are not, perhaps, so instructive. Some do endeavor to present market conditions from week to week, or month to month, but from our experience in looking over some of these, the information is not always correct and too often is misleading. The trade journals are entirely unbiased and are circulated not so much for public consumption as for the editors, directors, technicians, writers and others active in the motion picture profession, hence are of more value to you.



vival of the story and the color and atmosphere that had been done six or seven years previous, but forgotten by the later picture fans, to whom the Indians and the early pioneer life in the west was a relief from the monotony of the society drama.

The year 1921 witnessed a waning of the popularity of the cowboy film, including the feature film with the cowboy hero, and the two-reel western. They had been popular for years, particularly for foreign sale, where many in England and France believe that the cowboy with his six-shooter and the western desperado still run amuck west of Chicago. But with overproduction of films of this character came similarity and then monotony, and sales fell off. So the producers have curtailed the manufacture of films of this character and the next two years will see a further reduction in the output of cowboy pictures. Later they will again be in demand and will sell.

The ambitious writer should be alert for these "signs of the times." To take your wares to market intelligently, you must be up on market requirements. The vaults of the producer may be filled with pictures of a certain type but he may be buying stories having to do with a different subject. So it is up to you to watch for the changes in policy which work sometimes almost overnight. This can only be accomplished by a close study of the trade journals and of motion picture series that are produced and at the same time making a consistent effort to get something different or what is being produced. This



WHILE REMEMBERING VARIOUS STARS' ETC. LIARITH'S. DON'T  
 FORGET THAT, CLANON'S "SCAFFOLD" ALWAYS BE. HOWA... IN THE 18TH



THE MAN AND THE WOMAN, BY ALICE J. BROWN

## HOW AND WHERE TO SELL YOUR SCENARIO

"something different" is always devoutly wished for by the scenario editor, and even if your story is not in the environment desired at that particular time, its freshness and originality and the fact that it is far away from the stereotyped may insure its sale.



## HOW AND WHERE TO SELL YOUR SCENARIO

"something different" is always devoutly wished for by the scenario editor, and even if your story is not in the environment desired at that particular time, its freshness and originality and the fact that it is far away from the stereotyped may insure its sale.



(Selznick)

ETAINÉ HAMMERSTEIN MAKES CHARMING, SIMPLE PICTURES

## HOW AND WHERE TO SELL YOUR SCENARIO

"something different" is always devoutly wished for by the scenario editor, and even if your story is not in the environment desired at that particular time, its freshness and originality and the fact that it is far away from the stereotyped may insure its sale.



## CHAPTER XXII

### HONESTY THE GOVERNING POLICY

**P**HOTOPLAY writers, particularly beginners in the art, seem to be obsessed with the idea that the scenario editor is continually on the lookout for something he can steal. The writer is very suspicious that the *film producing company* will steal plots submitted to them for sale.

We have mentioned before that if the writer submits his material to standard concerns, companies having a good reputation and rating, his stories are perfectly safe, as much so as if they were submitted to a *magazine or book editor*. Of course, in the film world there are numerous "fly by night" producing companies which spring up like mushrooms, and if the beginner sends his material to them it sometimes means that his manuscripts will be lost, ignored, or, if the idea appeals, it may be filched.

The writer should remember that there are millions of dollars back of the leading film producing companies of today, and that hundreds of thousands of dollars are frequently spent upon a single production. When he considers this, the writer will know that the one hundred or five hundred dollars paid him for an idea is one of the smallest items in the making of a picture. He should also give the motion picture editor the benefit of the doubt in the matter of brains. If the editor gets an extraordin-

arily good plot from an outside writer, particularly one hitherto unknown to him, it is but good business for that editor to foster and encourage the work of the writer and not coolly appropriate his idea, which would mean only discouragement to the source of output and an abrupt termination of relations between the editor and the promising beginner. Film scenario editors of today are experienced men and women persons having not only experience but years of education in the business which is not now so new. They know that the best interests of their companies are conserved by their discovering and encouraging unknown talent, if such talent is at all available.

Then, too, the sum paid for the story would amount to far less than would the expense to which the company would be put if the story was stolen and produced, and the author then sued the company for stealing his story. It is far cheaper to pay a good price for a story than to steal it.

We have known instances where unknown writers submitted stories and were paid sums ranging from fifty dollars to two hundred and fifty dollars for manuscripts which were not usable for motion picture production. The reason for this is that the editor had discovered unusual plotting ability on the part of the unknown writer and, with the permission of the general manager of his company he bought the story and sent the author a check along with an encouraging letter, for the sole purpose of obtaining more of that writer's output. This action is not so foolish as it might seem at first consideration. The

editor, an experienced one, after a careful study of the writer's manuscript, was sure that he had unusual talent for scenario writing. He knew from the author's own statement that this was his first attempt in *motion picture writing*, and that by his sending that author a modest check and thus getting on a personal friendship basis with him by means of correspondence, he would be assured of the later work of this particular writer, which, after careful coaching and *encouragment*, would be especially suitable for some particular star. In other words, this editor discovered talent and at the same time instilled loyalty to his firm by a fifty or a one hundred dollar check.

The experienced worker in the literary vineyard, *whether it be short stories, books or motion picture plays*, knows there is nothing new under the sun. He knows there are only a certain number of plots and that they have all been done many times. Delilah "vamped" Samson long before motion pictures were made. The Bible presents the "eternal triangle," the prodigal son and many other ideas which are made into motion picture plays today. All the new writer can hope to do is to get some new twist or turn to an old situation and thus *embellish the standard plot*.

Taking these facts into consideration, is it any wonder that we see so much similarity of plot? And when some ambitious writer conceives a brilliant plot containing two men and one woman or two women and one man, submits it to an editor and receives in time a rejection slip, he may afterwards see something similar on the screen, but he should not jump

to the conclusion that his plot has been stolen, added to, produced, and he cheated out of his just remuneration.

The author has handled thousands of manuscripts and can truthfully say that many stories received at the studios are startlingly similar. In one day two manuscripts may come into the studio from widely separated places, carrying similar main titles and containing much of the same material, even to the locale of the story. We have seen this happen time and again.

While the outside contributors are sometimes suspicious and proclaim that the motion picture companies are not entirely honest, what about the honesty of the author himself? Any editor will tell you that where there is one producing firm or publishing company which stoops to dishonesty, there are hundreds of thousands of writers, good, bad and indifferent, who must constantly be watched. This rule does not apply to the amateur writer alone. We can cite many instances where authors of wide reputation have been seemingly tempted and have fallen for methods not altogether honest or honorable. We are glad to say that such authors are decidedly in the minority, but there are a considerable few who are more or less in the bad graces of film editors, simply because the editors are fearful that their work is not to be entirely trusted.

There is one well known writer of motion picture plots who is particularly partial to western material, and who has submitted ostensibly original stories

which contain some of the best situations from the books of Jack London, Rex Beach, Zane Grey and others, and in his continuity this writer does not hesitate to borrow subtitles and paragraphs from the works of the above and other writers of western stories.

Writers of this class are considered dangerous for the reason that the film editor, not having read everything in the world, is afraid that no matter how good the plot may be, some of it has been "borrowed" to put it mildly, and if such material were screened it might mean legal difficulties.

There are other authors, more or less prominent, who borrow freely from the old time classics, including works of Scott, Dickens, Thackeray, etc. There is no particular objection to this class of borrowing for these works have long been out of copyright, but the film editor feels that money expended for these thinly disguised plots is not well spent, for he can himself borrow just as readily from these old authors and rebuild the story with the aid of his salaried staff.

When the beginner, or the professional writer for that matter, compliments himself that he has "put one over" on the scenario editor in submitting Charles Dickens' "Great Expectations" under another title, changing the names of the characters and bringing the plot up to date, and asking twenty five hundred dollars for the purloined story, he is usually mistaken. In this day and age the scenario editor probably has as much and even more knowledge of

the world's literature than the writer who attempts to deceive him.

And when submitting manuscripts either to a publishing house or to a film editor, be ethical. There are some unwritten rules in the submitting of a manuscript and one is not to submit the same story to several firms simultaneously. Many beginners do this and it is a mistake. Should their methods become known to the editors and readers it detracts from their future opportunities for selling stories. And the writer who follows this policy soon becomes known to the different editors, for there is a sort of free masonry among them when it comes to a question of writers who violate the rules of the literary game.

Here is an instance of the trouble which may result from the submission of one story to two producing companies at the same time. Not long ago a certain writer wrote a good western story. He made copies of his manuscript and submitted it to two film producing companies at the same time, changing only the main title. One motion picture company needed a story quickly for their star so they put the story into production and then started negotiations with the author for its purchase. The other company also liked the story and began to negotiate for its purchase. The author, perhaps frightened because of the way he had marketed his wares, or wishing to bid one company against the other for its sale, did not promptly divulge what he had done. The two stars for whom stories were desired and for whom

It was considered, happened to meet in the Metropolitan Hotel in Los Angeles at the dinner hour. One had come in from New York to do all but the first reel of his picture. The first reel had already been photographed. He started to tell his actor friend the wonderful story he was doing and how much he liked it. As he unfolded the plot his fellow actor stared at him in amazement, for it was the same story which he wanted and for which his company was negotiating. The result was the disappointment of one star in losing his story, and the author by this act spoiled his future market with two big producing companies for neither would consider his work thereafter. Had it not been for the accidental meeting of the two actors, there is no telling but that the second company might have put the story into production—there would have been a clash of interests; court litigation, and trouble all around.

So you see it is best not to make copies of your story and submit to several firms at the same time. Wait until the first company returns it, if it is returned, before submitting it to another.

The film scenario editor is a long suffering individual, for there is no more pestiferous person in the world than the over enthusiastic writer. We know of one editor who had to remove the telephone from his home because ambitious writers would call him up at all hours of the night, asking for reports on their stories, and if he were willing to consider

or that situation. The editor must  
who insist on forcing an entrance

into his sanctum to explain to him their latest and most brilliant plot idea. The beginner in scenario writing may pride himself on the fact that he is not this species of pest. The writer who acts his story all over the private office of the editor, takes up a great deal of the valuable time of the editor.

This sort of writer also lurks in the hotel lobbys of Los Angeles and New York, ready to pounce upon the unsuspecting editor and relate to him his latest story.





enfold logically—all things that you can learn from carefully studying this book.

Possibly the tuition fee will include criticism of a certain number of scenarios also. This is valuable, of course, if the critics are persons who know their business.

But here we come back to a point mentioned some time ago—be sure that the course on which you decide is given by reliable people. Many such advertised courses are given by "Mr. So-and-so who has been a director for years." That's just what he probably has been—a director for years, rather than for a producing organization, or for the public. If he was a director who really knew his business, he'd still be directing, at a good salary, instead of trying to get would-be scenario writers to give him their money.

This does not mean that all courses in scenario writing are fakes—far from it. There are several very good ones, given by good teachers, and worth the money asked for them. But none of them can actually *make* you a scenario writer, as I have said before. So, no matter how good your teacher is, you may be disappointed when you finish.

The courses which promise to sell your stories are not likely to be reliable. They can try to sell your stories, but that is all they can do. They can submit them to scenario editors and await a verdict. You can do that yourself.

So you see, after all, it comes back to one thing—you, and your own ability to write. If you know a plot when you meet one, and can handle it well, you

## PHOTOPLAY WRITING

can write scenarios. If you don't see  
possibilities of becoming a photoplay writer, until you have developed that  
instinct. Then some of them may help you to de-  
velop yours. But beware if you can't profit by them.

By means of writing any good book on scenario  
writing you can learn just as much as you can from  
any other book on the subject. And the best critics  
of the day are the persons whom you most wish  
to please. They may like a  
book that you would turn down—  
but they will always exert a  
powerful influence.

By means of the book in this book, and  
by means of the criticism with it, you can  
know just what is the best course to follow.

## CHAPTER XXIV

### THE VALUE OF ORGANIZATIONS.

**F**ORMING of little societies or circles by ambitious writers for the purpose of discussing screen work, has been found to be very beneficial. Such organizations have flourished since the very beginning of the motion picture industry. We remember in 1913 the formation of the "Inquest Club," originated by E. Winthrop Sargent, then a staff writer for the old Lubin Film Mfg. Company, now staff writer for the Motion Picture World. He conceived the idea of getting together the ambitious authors of that vicinity and meeting monthly at a certain Bohemian restaurant in New York, where discussions of the motion picture plays and the writers thereof were held.

So far as we know, the Inquest Club was the first regular gathering of the writers of film plays, real and near, ever held. Since that time similar organizations have come and gone and today there are numbers flourishing, principally in New York and Los Angeles, the centers of the film world. The Authors' League and the Screen Writers' Guild are important organizations having the interests and benefit of screen writers at heart. In these last two, however, only recognized authors are eligible to membership.

Perhaps in your city or town there are one or more men and women who are striving hard for success in motion picture play writing. Maybe you know them

## P H O T O P L A Y   W R I T I N G

by name. Even a little notice inserted in one of the newspapers might put you in touch with such persons. By holding a meeting and forming a little circle or society for the furtherment of your mutual aims, you will find that a great deal of benefit may be derived from this form of co-operation.

In Los Angeles there is a club composed of amateur writers called "The Photoplaywrights." A few months after its formation, its members totalled close to one hundred. This club, of course, has the great advantage of location and it is not difficult for them to have a speaker for one evening a month. Sometimes a well known director spends an evening with them upon their invitation and gives them a little talk on the kind of picture stories he likes. At another time an editor from one of the studios, or a successful writer of motion picture stories is the guest of the evening. The editor tells them what he needs most at the time; or the author gives them a little inside information on how, when or why he succeeded in selling a story to a certain producing company.

The Program Committee of the Photoplaywrights has in its hands the mapping out of the program of work from week to week. One week the members will be requested to see a certain picture, which at the next meeting will be the the subject of discussion. The picture is dissected from a story standpoint, analyzed and criticized in an endeavor to find out just why the story was bought and what qualities it possessed for the making of a successful picture.

## THE VALUE OF ORGANIZATIONS

---

Another form of class work is the writing of a story around a given plot, or a certain situation. Each member is required to turn in a story embracing the selected plot, or situation. These are read and freely criticized and, if possible, a composite story is made, taking the best of several class stories, in the hope of getting something good enough to be salable. If such a story is marketed, of course, the money goes into the club treasury.

You will find that the benefits derived from the organization of the photoplay writers in your city or town will be very far reaching. As previously stated, you may not be fortunate enough to hear lectures from authorities in the film industry, but you can follow the rest of the class work just as advantageously. You can visit the theatres, discuss the pictures; and exchange ideas on the plots you may yourself have in mind or be at work upon; and you will get the same inspiration from the united effort as if your club had its home in New York or Los Angeles.

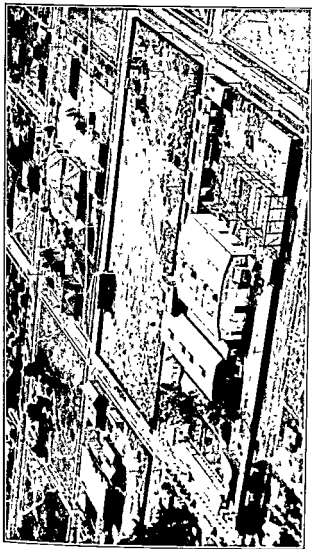
The scenario departments of many of the big film companies have found that two heads or three heads are better than one, when it comes to concentrating upon a motion picture plot. When J. A. Berst was vice-president and general manager of The Pathé Company in New York City he engaged twelve men and women, people of ability, and gave them large salaries to do nothing but sit around a table in the scenario department office and discuss, criticize and suggest new business for the stories and continuities

which were being purchased for Pathé pictures. As I recall the personnel of that committee it included such writers and authors as, Arthur Reeves, Chas. A. Logue, Wallace C. Clifton, Agnes Johnson, Mark Edmund Jones, John Grey, Gilson Willetts, Lucien Hubbard, Bertram Milhauser, Frank Smith, Ouida Bergere, Charles Sarver, and others.

Frequently one of the members of this group would write a continuity on order, but the majority of these men and women, and others as the committee changed from time to time, devoted most of their time and energy to discussion and the endeavor to *better the motion picture story or scenario intended for production.*

So you see that the method of co-operation is not a new one in the motion picture industry, and if the idea is good enough to have a film company expend enormous sums weekly upon, it is good enough for the amateur writer to follow.

*We would suggest that you get in touch with the writers in your vicinity, form your club, start your discussions—and write. The study of a few standard books dealing with motion picture play writing and other angles of the industry is also well worth while, providing such works are from the pens of authors of experience.*



HIRE A MOTION PICTURE STUDIO. THE METRO ONE AT LOS ANGELES—THE SORT OF PLACE WHERE YOUR STORIES WILL BE SCREENED IF YOU CAN SELL THEM





## CHAPTER XXV

### A WORD IN CONCLUSION

THE motion picture story is not a written story, but a *rewritten* story. Contrary to the popular conception, the compiling of a motion picture story is not writing in the literary sense of the word. It does not depend so much upon word painting, dialogue and tricks of the literary craft as it does upon visualizing action as it is, and writing action, and atmospheric color.

We remember when even the word "Photoplay" was a storm center of criticism, for the word was coined not many years ago, when the Essanay Film Company of Chicago, then one of the units of the old General Film Company, proposed a contest on the best name for a motion picture story. Thousands of names were submitted, out of which the prize name chosen was photoplay. Immediately some of the critics of the motion picture trade journals of that period, and others interested in the industry, opposed the name "photoplay" for various reasons, ranging from the argument that the motion picture story was not a play in the real sense of the word, down to the criticism that this was a trite and undignified appellation for the silent drama. Just the same the new word was coined, and so long as the motion picture is popular, just so long will the name photoplay be popular.

The writing of a photoplay is entirely unlike the

writing of a short story. One depends upon diction and word painting, and the other depends upon visualization and action. The author of this volume has read and analyzed thousands of manuscripts submitted for motion pictures, and, without fear of contradiction, will state that the principal objection to *most of the stories comes from the author's misconception of the requirements of the screen*. Many of the manuscripts attempt word painting, telling how the sun rose in the east, etc., which is non-essential. The motion picture manuscript that sells is the one that tells action clearly and yet tersely.

One of the best writers of motion picture plots in the so-called old days, when shorter subjects were in vogue and when a four reel production was, indeed, a tremendous undertaking, was a carpenter. He was a man who worked with his hands, but who had the *happy faculty of mental visualization*. He could look at a picture on the wall and describe it in simple language, and his mental pictures were described in the same way. His manuscripts contained the bare skeleton of his idea, written in simple language, so that editors buying for the screen could see clearly just what was in the mind of the author. He had the faculty of knowing plot value. Though he had only a high school education, he possessed the ability to put on paper his mind pictures, without flowery rhetoric or unnecessary details, so that those in need of motion-picture plots could visualize immediately the story he had in mind. He could, so to speak, "hit the editor between the eyes" with what he had to say.

He thought the picture and did not strive for literary excellence, which, to our mind, is the secret of successful writing for the motion-picture screen.

In the old days ten dollars was the accepted price for a motion picture plot, and when the two-reelers came into vogue, twenty-five dollars made the writer proud, indeed. It is Carl Laemmle, President of the Universal Film Mfg. Company in those halcyon days when the Universal was fighting the so-called General Film Trust, to whom we are indebted for raising of the price of motion-picture stories. Coming from Oshkosh, Wisconsin, to Chicago, and branching out from there into New York where he had a studio at No. 102 West 101st Street, he developed many of the stars of the present time. Thomas Ince and Joe Smiley were among his directors, while King Baggott, Mary Pickford, Jack Pickford, Owen Moore, and other celebrities were members of his stock company. He raised the price of the motion-picture story of those days from the ten dollar post office money order sent to the successful author to a check for twenty-five dollars.

The scenario editor of the old days was also required to write many of the continuities. We remember Giles R. Warren, C. B. (Pop) Hoadley, Lawrence McClosky, Benjamin Schulberg, Louella O. Parsons, and others who read the manuscripts of the aspiring authors. We also remember the ads. that were placed in motion-picture trade journals in which it was stated that twenty-five dollars would be paid for acceptable motion picture plots.



pictures, notably Colonel Wm. M. Selig of Chicago, were wise enough to purchase the film rights of quite a number of short stories and novels of ten years ago. These were willingly offered and there should be no objection today on the part of authors to the negotiations which they so cheerfully entered into a few years ago.

The history of motion pictures sounds like romance, even the details of the prices of stories. No longer than four years ago the author of this book left New York for California with "Bob Hampton of Placer," by Randall Parrish, and "Desert Gold," the Zane Grey novel, and these were both on the market for five hundred dollars each. The stars for whom these stories were intended objected to them, the Randall Parrish story because it was an Indian massacre, and "Desert Gold" because it had a sort of prologue. The success of these two stories two or three years later is but film history. They have made thousands and thousands of dollars for the authors and producers.

The time is coming—almost here, in fact—when the *original* story will be the anchor to windward for the motion-picture industry. Think of it yourself! Nearly everything in the book line has been produced on the screen—this includes classics and popular novels. There is only a limited supply of new novels each year, and only a limited supply of short stories which are adapted to motion-picture utilization. Then what are we to do? The only thing we can do is depend upon those who can plot

and work especially for the motion picture. It is an accepted fact that the book transposed into pictures is disappointing to readers who visualized the characters in the popular novel, for when such a reader sees a picture to see his favorite characters metamorphosed into life he is disappointed, not only from type and situation but from story standpoint. Why? Because most out of ten of the novels of the present day do not contain sufficient action to make a commercial length motion picture—and by commercial length we mean from five thousand to seven thousand feet of film.

We are conservative when we state that the fund of stories for motion pictures depends upon the writer of original work in the future, and, happily, in this work the novel must keenly compete with the cartoon. The novelist must forget his word painting and get right down to screen terms and action along with the contributor who may be unskillful in the handling of adjectives, but who can plot, and who can visualize.

Other Exceptional Books on  
**PHOTOGRAPHY**  
AND KINDRED SUBJECTS

**Modern Picture Photography**



# **The New York Institute of Photography**

**gives a complete  
Residence Course  
in Photography**

**MOTION PICTURE  
COMMERCIAL  
PORTRAITURE**

**covering in a thorough and practical way  
every phase of this profitable profession**

*For Complete Catalog and location  
of our most convenient School  
address the central office:*

**New York Institute of Photography**

**Department 16**

**141 West 36th Street**

**NEW YORK CITY**

